

INTO THE NIGHT



FRANCES NIMMO GREEN



"I'M TRYING TO FIND MYSELF, DON'T YOU SEE?"

INTO THE NIGHT

A STORY OF NEW ORLEANS

BY
FRANCES NIMMO GREENE

ILLUSTRATED BY C. F. NEAGLE

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To
*The one who most commands
my love and admiration*
My Brother

*Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny,
The way that I am bid by you to go:
To follow I am ready. If I choose not,
I make myself a wretch, and still must follow.*

—EPICTETUS.

CONTENTS

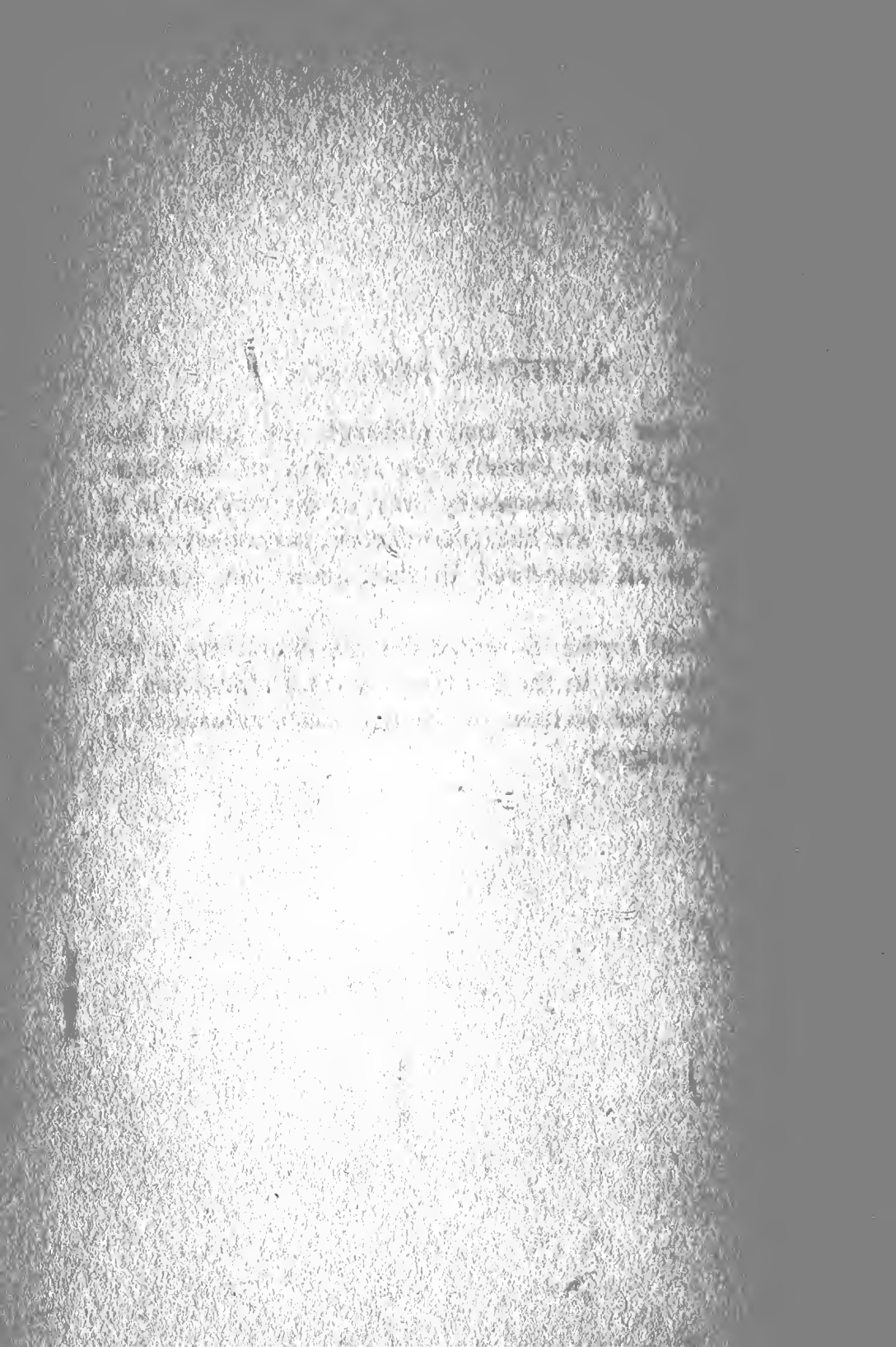
	PAGE
I. "WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN'S BLOOD, BY MAN SHALL HIS BLOOD BE SHED." . . .	I
II. DIVIDED	25
III. BY THE HELP OF SAINT JOSEPH	37
IV. THE MOVING FINGER WRITES	51
V. SHADOWS CAST BEFORE	56
VI. THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN	65
VII. LIKE SIRE, LIKE SON	72
VIII. CRIME OR CATASTROPHE?	89
IX. THE SEARCH	103
X. THE SECRET OF THE BAYOU	120
XI. LETHE	126
XII. ON THE STILL-HUNT	132
XIII. THE DREAM OF AN IDEALIST	136
XIV. THE LETTER	146
XV. THE SUMMONS	153
XVI. THE SUMMONS ANSWERED	164
XVII. "RELATING TO ZOE"	179
XVIII. IGNES FATUI	189
XIX. CROSS-EXAMINATION	202
XX. SINDBAD THE SAILOR	212
XXI. THE MYSTERY OF VIEUX CARRÉ . . .	218
XXII. HELEN FINDS HERSELF	235

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. A SONG AND ITS BURDEN	242
XXIV. THEORY AND PRACTICE	251
XXV. COMPLICATIONS	258
XXVI. THE ROBBERY	274
XXVII. EXECUTOR WITHOUT BOND	280
XXVIII. "WITHOUT THOUGHT OF ANY OTHER"	291
XXIX. YOUNG LAWRENCE DEMANDS AN EX- PLANATION	301
XXX. FRANK AND HELEN	323
XXXI. FOR HONOR	328
XXXII. A CONFESSION	339
XXXIII. EXPIATION	358

ILLUSTRATIONS

From drawings by C. F. Neagle

“I’M TRYING TO FIND MYSELF, DON’T YOU SEE?”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
“MY SON—SHE IS NOT—WHITE”	82
SHE SHRANK BACK AGAINST THE WALL	228
“OH, EVEN A WOMAN MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THAT IS THE ONE THING A MAN MAY NOT YIELD!”	338



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It is fair to state that although the author has made use of the dramatic punishment of the murderers of Chief Hennessey only as an incident in a fictitious story, she has, nevertheless, attempted to do justice to all concerned in that great, but terrible, event.

It should further be stated that the characters in the story who lead in the lynching of the Italians are, in no respect, pen-pictures of the men who commanded in the real tragedy.

INTO THE NIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

“WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN’S BLOOD, BY MAN SHALL
HIS BLOOD BE SHED”

IT was barely the middle of March, but springtime was already calling the dead to rise. And not only from the broad stretches of river lands that encircle the great city did the answer come; every inch of New Orleans earth, whether it lay in city park or curious old-time garden, along the sides of pavements or in the crannies of crumbling buildings, had become an empty sepulcher, and that which had been sown and had died stood forth in the freshness of a first creation.

Beyond the laden crescent of wharves, beyond the traffic-blocked thoroughfares, the scene became beautiful with palm and myrtle and magnolia, for the long streets were embowered with a greenness and leafiness that belong alone to the South and springtime.

On one of these cool, quiet streets there stood a certain old house so sheltered by giant magnolias and a high iron fence, that the passer-by would be apt to miss seeing it altogether, were it not for occasional glimpses of tall columns caught through the green shadows. To-day there was brightness enough about the place, for the morning was ideal and the dwelling

fronted the risen sun. The long east windows were open for the refreshing air and the sunshine, and the presence of a mulatto girl, broom in hand, on the front steps, showed that the servants, at least, were astir.

Before the girl had languidly brushed the bottom step one of the hall doors opened and a white-haired man came out and stood on the veranda above her. Though the head which the morning sunlight illumined was innocent of any touch of brown or black, and though there were traces of some three-score years and more in the lines of the man's face, there was that about him which put the idea of decline out of the question when one looked at him. It was not so much the straightness of his form or the sureness of his tread that forbade the association of the idea of decay with him. A something within him, over which years seemed to have had no power, looked out of his calm blue eyes and lent them a directness of gaze that had in it the strength of eternal youth.

As he stood now, waiting for the maid to rescue the morning paper from the meshes of a rose-vine, his clear gaze was distinctly apprehensive, and there were lines of trouble on his brow that seemed foreign to its smoothness.

"Half-past nine o'clock, and that paper just here!" he exclaimed impatiently, as he snapped his watch. "Sallie, why wasn't I waked early, as I directed?"

"I don' know, suh, tain' none o' me—you tol' Aun' Rena an' Aun' Rena tol' Tom, an' he forgot it, I spec!"

He had the paper in his hands by this time and was so busy scanning its headlines that he apparently failed to hear her excuses. In a few seconds his glance was arrested; he sank mechanically on a seat near by, and read:

"All good citizens are invited to attend a mass-meeting on Saturday, March 14th, at 10 o'clock A. M. at Clay statue, to take steps to remedy the failure of justice in the Hennessey case. Come prepared for action."

Mr. Lawrence dropped the paper into his lap, and nervously removed his spectacles. From his comfortable gallery chair he gazed down the long, palm-studded avenue. There was pulsing joy in the blue above him and pulsing joy in the green at his feet, for springtime and sunshine called to every living thing. Five minutes before, and he could have pictured to himself the Spirit of Peace hovering over the quiet city; now there was menace in the very air about him, and a suggestion of tragedy in the call of mocking-bird from tree to tree. No man who knew the circumstances of the crisis through which New Orleans was just then passing, and who knew also the characters of the men whose names were signed to that call, could have mistaken its purport. In another moment Mr. Lawrence had risen from his chair, and in that rising he seemed to grow as young in body as in spirit. He was a man of action now, strong to grapple with that which was before him. Quickly stowing the paper away in his pocket, he entered the

hall and took down his hat from the high, old-fashioned rack.

"Heyo, Daddy!" came in girlish accents from somewhere above him. At the sound of the fresh young voice, he looked up quickly, and smiled at a girl who was leaning over the banisters to him.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" she queried.

"Yes," he answered, "but small thanks to you, you sleepy-head. Come down, Zoe, I want to speak to you. There's going to be trouble in town to-day," he continued, when she had come near enough for him to lower his voice.

"What? The Mafia?" she broke in unceremoniously. "What are they going to do? Where is it? Who——"

"Ah-h, hush! How can I tell you anything when you go off like that? There's a call through the papers for a meeting of citizens at the Clay statue at ten this morning—it's nearly that now—and I don't know what may follow. Listen to me, now, and mind me. Keep yourself and Helen and your auntie at home to-day. Don't let Helen get hold of the morning paper,—and keep the servants away from town—hear me?"

"Auntie and Helen and the darkies all to be managed—and at the same time! Well, send me the whole police force of New Orleans, and together—we'll do what we can."

He had not waited for her answer, and was half-way down the steps when she concluded. When

his foot touched the gravel of the front walk, however, he stopped suddenly, turned, and hurried back into the hall again.

"Come here, Zoe," he called. His manner was peremptory this time, for he had seen her gather up her skirts and dart like a swallow up the broad stairs, as if glad to escape.

The girl, who had nearly gained the second floor, turned reluctantly and again came down. The flip-pant assurance of her manner, which only a touch of lovingness had saved from downright impertinence, had now left her, and she looked anything but comfortable as she descended in the searchlight of the old man's stern gaze.

"You told me last night that Frank had stayed at the plantation, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure he did?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Lawrence turned as if there were no time to be lost in further questioning and hurried away. For fully three minutes Zoe stood where he left her, looking after him. When his tall form was lost behind the shrubbery of the adjoining yards, a smile of something like self-approbation parted her red lips, and she said to herself, distinctly:

"Now *Helen* would have told him the truth."

It lacked but a few minutes of ten o'clock when Mr. Lawrence slammed the gate behind him, but he was fortunate enough to catch a down-town car at

the first corner. It was almost too late, he told himself, and in his impatience, Prytania and Camp streets seemed to stretch out interminably. He blamed himself for having slept so late that morning, taking no thought of the fact that the gray dawn had looked in at his windows before he had closed his eyes in troubled sleep.

John Lawrence was not the only man in New Orleans whose waking and sleeping hours had been troubled that night. On the afternoon before, the whole city had been startled; and they in whose hands lay the safety of the city had had reason to lie awake and think. If Mr. Lawrence had been thinking along a line somewhat different from that which suggested itself to the many who had lain wakeful that night, it was because he was of an unusual temperament, and not because he did not share the feeling of outrage and indignation that had swept over the city at the verdict rendered in the famous Mafia case on the afternoon before. John Lawrence was a man of peace and leaned decidedly to the doctrine of non-resistance to evil, but his soul had been stirred to its depths.

For years the Mafia, a secret and dangerous society of Italians, had flourished in New Orleans, yet it was little fault of the city government that it had not been rooted out. Its members preyed mainly upon each other, but so strong were the vows that bound them together, that it had always been found impossible to get them to testify even against their bitterest private enemies. Murders had been com-

mitted in broad daylight in the open streets, but there was never a witness to be found who would say he saw.

So assassination after assassination had gone unpunished, till the chief of police, by correspondence with the authorities at Rome and Palermo, and by the assistance of an Italian priest, found that there was a branch of the Mafia in New Orleans consisting of three hundred and sixty members, eighty of whom were escaped convicts from Italian prisons.

No sooner had Chief Hennessey come into possession of these facts, than the Mafia, by some mysterious black art of spying, learned of his discoveries. The chief's life paid the forfeit, but the city was at last aroused.

The arrest of nineteen suspects had followed. Nine had been tried for the crime.

The charge had been "murder," the evidence damning, the verdict, "not guilty" as to six, including the man against whom the evidence was strongest, and "mis-trial" as to the others, among whom was the wretch that had made a full confession.

This was the verdict that had startled the city on the afternoon before. This was the failure of justice that had prompted the call to the good citizens,—one of whom was now on his way to answer it according to his own conscience.

The car stopped at Canal street, effectually blocked by the mass of people that filled the broad thoroughfare. Mr. Lawrence hurried out with the other pas-

sengers, but clung to a place on the rear platform for a few minutes to take in the situation.

Canal street was filled with men, peering between and over each other, and pressing slowly and laboriously northward. Eager lookers-on scrambled to the tops of the detained cars, climbed telephone poles, or crowded the doors and windows which looked out upon the scene, while only a block further the figure of Henry Clay rose, calm and grand, above the menacing quiet of the leashed storm.

Forcing his way out into the street, Mr. Lawrence shaded his eyes and looked toward the statue. A man was standing on the steps which led up to it. He seemed to be addressing the people.

There was little to be learned from the thousands of black-coated backs that were turned to the old man, and he was much too far away to hear the words of the speaker, so he resolutely turned his shoulder edgewise and began wedging his way into the thickest of the crowd. A hundred familiar faces looked into his own as he progressed, and many a remark was addressed to him in tones that were not strange to his ears; but he was a man on business bent, so he answered briefly, and pushed his way to the center.

His familiar face and white hair proved an open sesame even to the dense group near the railing around the statue. Here he found himself pinned up against the wheels of a wagon, every available space of which was covered with men and boys. As Mr. Lawrence

looked up, he caught a grin of recognition from his office boy, who was just above him, on the coupling pole.

"Tim, I'll give you fifty cents for your place," called the old man, poking the boy with his cane by way of emphasis.

"Make it a dollar, sir," demanded Tim. The contract was quickly closed. The next minute Mr. Lawrence mounted out of the shadow of the press around him to a clear view of the scene. From his elevation he could see far up and down Canal street, and for some distance out Rue Royale and St. Charles—through the very vitals of the great city—and though the street seemed already overflowing, the crowd still came pouring steadily, quietly in from four points of the compass.

"All good citizens" had been invited to meet here, and the old man's breath was almost taken away by the readiness with which they had responded. The men that he saw before him were men whom he met every day—in his business, in his down-town life, at the club, in society, even in the exclusiveness of his own home—doctors, lawyers, mechanics, men of every profession and of every trade. Mr. Lawrence could scarcely believe the witness of his heretofore unfailing eyes. Only here and there was there an interspersing of the noisy, irresponsible element; the men who made up the main body of that vast assemblage had evidently answered the call in earnest, and they could not have been quieter if they had been born dumb. Thousands

of them packed the meeting place, making no sort of demonstration, save to answer the questions of the speaker. Standing there, grim and silent, with no attempt whatever to conceal their identity, they constituted the element in which the danger lay; and he who ran might have read the grim meaning of that quiet.

At one sweeping glance John Lawrence took in the scene and its dire significance, then he turned his attention wholly to the speaker. But the speech was just finished, and the crowd was applauding.

"Pity you didn't get here in time to hear that," said a man at his elbow. "Look, there's another!"

At that moment a tall young fellow mounted the steps that led up the pedestal to the statue, and faced the crowd under the extended arm of the great Kentuckian. As his strong, bold figure came into relief before them, the crowd cheered vigorously; but the old man on the wagon-tongue suddenly paled and raised his hand as if in unconscious warning. When the cheering ceased, the speaker was saying:

"There is not one man of you in this vast gathering but carries his life at the mercy of organized assassins and midnight murderers. A committee of fifty citizens was appointed by your mayor to help bring to justice the assassins of Dave Hennessey. We were told to try the law. We have tried it, and it has failed. Now we come back to you and lay the matter in the hands from which we received it." He paused significantly, and his fierce gray eyes swept

the crowd around and beneath him. There was silence for a moment—silence of the sort that cannot long be borne, and then a voice called out:

“Let’s act, we’ll follow you!”

“I say to you,” continued the speaker, after a quick, burning glance at the man who had answered him, “that your committee and courts are powerless to protect you, and you must protect yourselves. There are in the parish prison men who have been declared ‘not guilty’ of the murder of Dave Hennessey, while every man here knows that they *are* guilty! Shall these men go free?” There was terrible meaning in his glance, and no man might mistake it.

It was a tense moment; and then—

“No! No!” came from a thousand throats. The crowd pressed closer.

“Shall bribed jurors say that they *shall* go free?” he demanded.

“NO!” they answered as one man.

“Justice has not been done”—the deep voice shook with repression. “It remains for you citizens to mete out that punishment to the guilty which the law has been powerless to effect. Are you ready?”

Cries of “We are!” arose on all sides.

“Very well, gentlemen. The committee has selected us as your officers, and we are ready to lead you. Mr. Dickerson, here, is your captain, Mr. Hunter your first lieutenant, and your second lieutenant is myself.” Here, the first speaker, and a powerful young fellow whom Mr. Lawrence’s eye had not be-

fore singled out of the crowd, mounted the steps and took their places beside him.

When the three men, young, forceful, influential, and of good repute, stood up before the people and pledged themselves to the fearful responsibility of that leadership, such a shout went up that the groan of the old man on the wagon was lost as is a grain of sand in the mighty sea.

With a commanding movement of his hand, the speaker reduced the crowd to silence again, and proceeded.

"We will lead you on one condition, and that is, that no man except one of your officers shall give an order, and that any man giving an order on his own responsibility, or refusing to obey one given by an officer, shall do so at the forfeit of his own life. There must be no rioting here. The men who are guilty must be executed, but not one innocent man must be touched. You yourselves must render the verdict in their individual cases, and decide here before we go further. But first remember that the State has said there is no evidence against Francisco and Sapareno. These two must not be harmed. The boy, Antonio, is too young to die. Do you will that he shall go free?"

"Aye, aye!" came from the multitude. Then, one by one, the speaker called over the names of the assassins, the solemn and awful tribunal around him pronouncing the sentence of death as each name was submitted.

"We are prepared to do our duty," said the speaker, including in his gesture the men who stood beside him. "Are you prepared to do yours?" There was no mistaking the answer that came from the crowd.

"Then come on!" cried the young fellow, and the three leaders quickly descended to the street. In an instant every one woke to action. Old Mr. Lawrence never knew how he got down from the wagon, but the next minute he had shoved several able-bodied men aside and laid a strong grasp on the arm of the man who had last spoken and who was now giving quick and decisive orders.

"Girard, for God's sake!" was all he could say.

"You!" cried the young man, in unfeigned astonishment, "stand back, please, we are in earnest here." He shook off the old man's clinging hand and quickly shoved his way to the head of the crowd that was already surging up Canal street.

Mr. Lawrence, with all his vigor, had hardly strength enough to resist being borne on by the great tide of humanity that filled the streets. At length, however, by main force he reached the sidewalk. Here he was eagerly scanning the faces of the passing throng, when he was run into and almost knocked down by a young fellow whom he promptly took by the collar. He did not say a word to his captive. He simply held him at arm's length, and looked him in the eye.

The young man whose progress was thus rudely interrupted suddenly grew rigid, and crimsoned up to

the roots of his hair, but he did not utter a word. At length the old man broke the ominous silence:

“That way lies murder, son. You and I will go home with clean hands.”

.

Throughout the length and breadth of the foreign quarter, the news spread like an infection. “They are killing the Italians!” it ran. And the people who but yesterday stamped the Stars-and-Stripes in the mud, and openly boasted that the Mafia would rule New Orleans, now chattered the rumor to and fro with deathly faces, as they scurried about in a fear that knew no reason and no hope.

Down in the old French Market, chaos had come again. No longer were the edges of the sidewalks heaped with orderly little piles of vegetables, whose soft-eyed owners squatted on the pavement beside their stock in trade. In an instant after the wild news had swept over the city, the riches of farm and orchard and garden were scattered broadcast on the filthy sidewalks and trampled to pieces by the rush of fugitive feet.

Inside, where the more pretentious stalls were, and where the crowd was denser, confusion was triumphant. Saxon butcher, French coffee-dispenser, and African porter, together with the host of English, French, and African purchasers that crowded the market, forgot the business in hand, and stood gaping in open-eyed pity and wonder. But the erstwhile sweet-eyed, soft-voiced Italians screamed and chattered

about in frenzy; a few remaining long enough to put up the blinds around their stalls, others fleeing without this precaution; and all taking refuge at last in their dens in the Italian Quarter, and barring themselves in against what they believed to be a general massacre.

There in their squalid, unprotected dens the panting fugitives crouched and listened and trembled, hearing in every innocent street cry a signal to slaughter, and in the rumble of each passing cart, the onward rush of ten thousand feet.

Farther up town where the more prosperous and more pretentious Italian citizens lived, there was no such dire panic; *there* was quiet—mysterious, inexplicable quiet.

In scarcely more than ten minutes after the close of the last speech at the Clay statue, the crowd that had divided and marched out Canal and Orleans streets, met again in Congo Square and surged across it to the parish jail where the Italians had been returned after their acquittal, to secure them from mob vengeance. A few minutes more and the streets which bounded the prison buildings were packed to their utmost capacity. At first, the interest was centered on the front side of the buildings, where one of the leaders stood at the entrance, making a rousing speech to the concourse before him. Around the corner, however, on Trèmè street, things were stiller and more ominous. Quiet and resolute, the young captain stood near the old wooden door of the prison known as the Trèmè entrance, and behind him

were twenty-eight men, armed with rifles and shot-guns. There was no other sign of weapon in that vast crowd, except the pistol in the hand of the lieutenant, Girard. But out in the crowd, in front of the jail door, was an engine of war that spoke for itself. A huge beam lay on the ground between lines of men and pointed toward the great door. There was almost complete silence among the group—they seemed waiting for something. Suddenly a shout arose on the Orleans side—they were cheering the leader's speech.

"Steady, men," called the lieutenant, as he took his place quickly beside the Trèmè entrance and signaled to the men who were lined up on each side of the improvised battering-ram.

Almost instantly the beam was raised. The men grasped it firmly and looked up at Girard for orders.

"Remember," he said clearly to the crowd, "remember that none but your captain and his picked men are to enter here; they will bring out the prisoners for execution. Steady—ready—now!" he called.

The great beam crashed against the door; the nail-studded timbers shook and split and cracked under the terrible impact, but the lock held fast.

Around the corner in Orleans street, the first lieutenant was still engaging the attention of the prison guards with his noisy demonstration.

Without waiting for another order, the double line of men retreated a few steps and again stove the ram against the weakening door. If they heard

the answering shrieks inside, they made no sign. Again, and yet once again, they drove the ram against the splitting timbers of the portal. At the last resounding thrust, locks, bolts, and hinges gave way and the great door fell in. A shout of triumph went up, but there was no disorderly rush for the opening. Girard stood on one side to guard the entrance, and on the other stood a man who had been deputed to assist him in keeping the crowd out of the prison. Captain Dickerson advanced quickly, followed by his picked men, each of whom paused to have his weapon examined, then passed in over the fallen door.

The shout that followed the breaking of the door attracted, as Girard had feared it would, a large portion of the crowd from the other streets, and the mass of people in front surged forward at the sound. The lieutenant knew that he must keep the crowd out at whatever cost, and he looked like a man prepared to do it. He spoke to those near, quickly and earnestly, and his voice and manner controlled them. He seemed a man born for leadership and for decisive action—one of those variations from the accepted original, which nature seems to form for special uses.

Not long, however, did his steady, determined manner avail to keep down the clamor for entrance. Already a group of noisy, pushing men had shoved to the front, and these paid little heed to the man who was giving orders, or to the admonition of the quiet, stern mass of men who stood ready to obey.

“Keep back, I tell you,” warned the lieutenant, as

the aggressors scrambled up the steps, demanding to pass in. "I have orders to let no one else cross this threshold."

The group fell back a little—all but the leader, a young man, whose desire for notoriety had rendered him over-zealous. He paused for one moment only, then advanced nonchalantly, exclaiming:

"I'm *damned* if I don't get in!"

"You'll be damned if you do!" Girard stepped in front of him, and the eyes of the two men met for one silent moment. The fellow fell back a few steps.

"Well, come on, boys!" he called to his confederates. "There are dagos to burn over there in the Trèmè market, let's go get them, and have a little lynching of our own."

"Halt!" Girard made a long stride forward and covered the man with his pistol. "There's going to be no massacre here," he said grimly. "If you try that I'll kill you. Come up here—now stand there—there against that door. Perkins, if he moves or speaks, shoot him."

"All right," answered the other in an ominously cheerful voice; and the reporter stood where he was placed, like a statue.

"Make way there!" called a voice from inside, and immediately there issued from the prison three of Dickerson's men, forcing before them a swarthy, black-browed foreigner.

"Which?" demanded Girard; but even as he asked,

his eyes answered the question—it was Guillermo, the one who had confessed. “Pass on,” the lieutenant said.

Three minutes afterward a struggling body swung to the breeze from a lamp-post at the corner. Then, almost before the suspended form ceased writhing, a man came running, pushing, shoving through the press to Girard.

“They are stripping it and firing into it—come!”

It was an intense moment for Girard. To let the deviltry proceed was to precipitate riot. To leave the spot where he stood seemed impossible. Just then a gray-haired, firm-jawed man stepped forward and brought out a weapon that had hitherto been concealed in his hip pocket.

“I’ll stand here, Girard; you go.”

“Good for you,” said the younger man, and hastening down the steps, he forced his way to the spot where the body was being outraged. In a few minutes, with the help of the more orderly element present, he succeeded in stopping the barbarity, but he did not leave the spot till he had stationed a guard of reliable men around the body with orders to kill the next man to interfere with it.

In a very short time he was back at his post, but before he could relieve his substitute, a sound came from within that made his heart stand still. This time it was not the shriek of the hunted—it was a rifle-shot, sharp and unmistakable. Girard’s face turned pale. Perkins and the gray-haired volunteer looked at

each other in dismay. The order had been to bring out the men and hang them. Clearly, someone inside had lost his head and disobeyed orders.

"Stay here," cried Girard quickly, and he hurried into the prison, to be met by the sound of a dozen or more shots in sharp succession.

A thousand footsteps seemed to be ringing in his ears, and even in that brief moment, he knew instinctively which were pursuing and which pursued—the scampering light tread of the flying—the sure tramp of the avenger behind. There were calls and shouts in voices that knew no fear, and cries and shrieks that answered them in all that man can know of agony. There were shots again—this time somewhere above him. As a man on the fighting line sees nothing of the progress and plan of the battle, scarcely recognizing either advantage or repulse in the rush and confusion and excitement, so Girard realized little of that closing scene while it was being enacted. It was all so quick, so short, so terrible.

He had scarcely gained the narrow, tunnel-like hall when a man ran past him at full speed, not too quickly, however, to be recognized as one of Dickerson's men.

"To the women's department," he called, seeing Girard. "They were about to escape, and the men are peppering them."

Following his lead, Girard ran down the long hall, his mind taking flashlight pictures of the musty tunnel, the vacant cells, the open and unguarded doors, as he went. Out of a door at the far end he sped,

and almost ran into a group of Dickerson's men before he could stop himself. One glance revealed to him the identity of the men in the squad; a second showed him a prisoner, white, limp, and terrified, cowering before the armed men. There had been no pause in the scene—the men, the Italian, and Girard had run upon each other at the same instant. And almost in that same instant three of the group raised their guns to their shoulders, with the muzzles within four feet of the prisoner's breast.

There was one thing to be done, and Girard did it without hesitation. He flung himself between them and the Italian.

"God! What a fool you are!" cried one of the men, dropping his weapon on the pavement.

"Stand back, Girard," called another, at the same time; "this is the very last, and we are going to finish him." The other two men had not lowered their weapons.

Girard was white about the mouth, but his glance was steady.

"Men," he exclaimed, and his voice showed the excitement he was laboring under, "what in the *hell* makes you go to pieces like this? The State has said there is no case against this fellow—this is the man, Francisco. Look at that scar on his face. Don't you remember him?"

The two other guns were lowered.

"Here, guard!" called the lieutenant, as one of the prison officers came near, "take this man and keep

him safe. Tell our men that he is Francisco, and is innocent."

The Italian had fallen at his feet and clasped him about the knees. Girard promptly extricated himself from the unwelcome embrace, and turned to the other men, who recounted hurriedly what had happened. The guard had given the prisoners the freedom of the jail; they had hidden in the women's department; nine had been shot to death;—in reply to a breathless question—Sapareno and the boy had not been harmed.

It was in that moment Girard realized that the hurrying footsteps, the shrieks, and the gun-shots had all ceased. Why, he knew only too well.

"It is all over?" he said in half question.

"Yes, and pretty thoroughly done," answered one of the others.

The group, with one accord, turned and crossed the court in which they had come together, Girard bringing up the rear at a distance of some half-dozen paces. The men in front paused near the grated door of a woman's cell and Girard joined them. There on the pavement against the wall was a gruesome sight—a ghastly, disorderly pile of human forms huddled together as if the creatures had instinctively sought the support of kindred spirits, even in the hour and article of death. The blood still flowed from some of them, and was congealing in pools on the uneven pavement. There were six bodies in all. The men stopped to count them. Girard, who had known all the prisoners by sight, having been almost con-

stantly in the court-room during their trial, examined the faces of the dead closely to be assured that no innocent man had suffered.

Five he believed to be guilty, and he took no further thought of them, but there was one under the bottom of the ghastly heap whose face could not be seen. The man's feet and legs were visible, and one hand and arm, wet to the shoulder with blood, lay stretched at length on the pavement. Girard regarded this intently, and wondered. He hated to take hold of the thing to prove or disprove his doubts.

Just then one of the men stepped in a dark, thick pool on the pavement. Paling slightly, he stamped and scraped his foot, finally going to where the rank grass crept up from between the cobblestones, and carefully wiping the blood off his shoe. Then he and the others moved on; Girard remaining behind—motionless—watching the red hand on the sidewalk.

As the sound of the men's steps and voices grew distant, the outstretched hand twitched convulsively, once or twice, then slowly drew itself under the sickening mass.

Hesitating an instant only, Girard laid hold of the legs that corresponded to the bloody arm, and with one stout pull dragged out the man, alive and uninjured, but red from head to foot.

"Stand up!" he commanded.

"I no killa da Chiefa! I no killa da Chiefa!" shrieked the blood-bedabbled creature, writhing and twisting on the pavement toward Girard's feet.

"Stand up, I tell you!" exclaimed the lawyer. The crawling thing had nearly touched him, and he stepped back, involuntarily.

With one lightning-like glance into the face above him, the Italian uncoiled and rose to his feet with the swift grace of a tiger. Girard gave one long, searching look at him.

"Sansoni!" he exclaimed; "and the blackest villain in the lot! Men!" he shouted to the ones who were just passing out of sight, "men, come back!" But his face went white as they answered his summons.

"From under there," he answered to a question, and he pointed to the heap of dead.

"Well, lieutenant, what are your orders?" asked the man who had arrived first. There was no pause between question and answer.

"This is Sansoni. He has got to die. No, no, not that," he added hastily, as two or three guns were raised. "We promised to hang them—go get a rope."

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In a certain damp and dark arcade a woman knelt before a crucifix, praying for the soul that was being sped into eternity; and down on Canal street stood the lone Kentuckian, with one hand extended, preaching peace to deserted streets and sunshine and silence.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVIDED

MR. LAWRENCE and his son dropped off the Prytania street car, and made their way down the half block of shady avenue that lay between them and home. They had scarcely addressed each other during their progress hither—the old gentleman staring beyond his surroundings into the future, and the young man, a handsome, boyish-looking fellow, frowning doggedly, in the spirit of a child that has been punished but not conquered.

“It’s better to come home this way, son,” said the old man, with forced cheerfulness, bringing his thoughts back to the present with an effort.

He spoke in a low tone, for they were nearing the front gate, and Zoe was holding it open for them with eyes and ears alert.

“Father, what——?” she stopped abruptly. The young man was raising his brows at her from over his father’s shoulder.

“Better let him alone—wait,” he telegraphed her.

So she merely tiptoed to be kissed, and then followed to the house in silence.

On the veranda two other women waited, pale and anxious, afraid to hear a confirmation of the wild rumors that had penetrated even to this sheltered spot.

But as the old gentleman came up the walk under the shade of the magnolias, the look on his face checked the questions that sprang to the women's lips.

He surrendered his hat and cane to Zoe like a man in a dream, and with his well-known "I want to speak to you, Susan," drew his sister-in-law away from the group to the privacy of his study.

As soon as the restraint of the father's presence was removed, the two girls assailed Frank with a volley of excited questions. The young man stood the fire valiantly. He soon forgot the shame of his own unheroic home-coming, and tingled with excitement as he painted the scene he had witnessed, and the more tragic scene even then in progress, in the realistic colors of his own youthful enthusiasm.

Throughout this stirring recital, Helen listened—her blue eyes wide with horror one instant, and the next, covered with hands that pressed close till the knuckles whitened with the strain.

"Oh, it is awful, awful!" she cried, in anguished sympathy.

"Nonsense! It serves them right," exclaimed the younger girl. "Frank, I don't see how you could keep out of it!"

"Neither do I," replied the young fellow, "but father did. I just tell you what, though, when Girard called on that crowd to follow him—Helen!—Sis!—Lord, didn't you know he led it?" He thought she was going to faint, and sprang to her side, but she drew away. "He was right, of course; do be sen-

sible," he pleaded, in genuine distress; but Helen pulled away from him and fled to her room.

Frank stood where she left him in frowning dismay; at length he exclaimed in disgust:

"Girls don't know anything!"

"You've played it now," was Zoe's comfort to him. "I had heard it already, but I had too much sense to tell her. Isn't she like father, though! I tell you what, I wouldn't sleep with Helen's conscience one night for a pretty."

"If you had the combination of Helen's conscience and your own tongue, you wouldn't be able to sleep at all," he retorted. "Say, how did father find out I was in town?"

"I don't know."

"*You* told him."

"You are a story, sir, I didn't." He drew her head back on his shoulder and looked into her eyes for a moment, then they both laughed, and their lips met in a kiss.

At lunch that day, only Miss Susan and Frank and Zoe appeared; and the afternoon was spent by them in the family sitting-room, reading the extra editions of the papers and discussing at length the day's fateful tragedy.

Dinner was a silent ordeal to all. Mr. Lawrence came to the table, but he was grave and preoccupied, and his knitted brow cast a gloom over the group. In his presence, all instinctively avoided the subject of the morning's tragedy; and as they could think of

nothing else, conversation was out of the question. Mr. Lawrence excused himself before the coffee was served, and went back to the seclusion of his study. He did not light his reading lamp, as usual, but settled himself in his big arm-chair to think.

In a few minutes the door opened, and Helen came in and took a chair beside him; her face was pale and haggard in the uncertain light of the one gas jet, and the father's eyes clouded more deeply. He laid his hand on hers and said simply;

"My darling." There were a few moments of silence, and then the girl asked:

"What do you think of it, father?"

"What do *you* think of it, Helen?"

"It was cruel—ghastly—I read the extra. Oh, I don't see how Herbert could—how he could!" The hand he held turned cold.

"And you and he?" he asked, with a deep-drawn sigh.

"I—I cannot see him any more, father. I couldn't take the hand that——" He felt her quiver, and turned his eyes away that he might not see the anguish in her face.

"Are you strong enough for this, dear?" he asked, forcing himself to look at her, at length. She answered him with her eyes; and the old man, who had worn the expression for three-score years, wondered where the girl got her magnificent glance.

"Thank God!" he said fervently; and there entered into his soul a feeling of relief so craved and so wel-

come that it seemed to be very peace. Then, because the strain had been removed, he grew talkative on the subject of her engagement, discussing with himself its various points; for youth with its dreams and its passions lay far behind him, and the lights were low, and Helen's face was in the shadow.

"This is not so bitter as the end that I have feared for you, daughter. I ought to have been strong enough to interfere long ago, and I've been writing hard things against myself; but I am an old man, Helen, and a weak one where my children are concerned, and I have hoped for the best, even against my better judgment. When I consented to your engagement to Herbert Girard, it was because I feared that my objections to him might prove to be but prejudices—that I might wreck your happiness by a too cautious conservatism. I liked Herbert—I like him, I mean—and the memory of his mother led me to hope that your influence would develop her nature in him. To-day has shown me that he is his father's son. More than that, I have seen for a long time what I dared not word to my own heart—that Girard's is by far a stronger nature than yours, and that, being the stronger, he is rapidly shaping your spirit to his own. Even now you are not the same Helen you were before his influence came into your life." She slipped down on the stool at his feet and hid her face on his knee. There was a break in the steady courage of his voice as he continued:

"I do not deny to Girard anything that the world

grants him. I give him full credit for his impregnable manliness of spirit, and I admire, too, the bulldog tenacity with which he lays hold on worldly success. A man with a nature like his, guided by the right ideals, would be the man of all others I would choose for you. If his ideas of right were exalted, he would follow them upward. If he were as merciful as he is just, and had the faith in God that he has in himself, I could give you into no better hands. But, my daughter, Girard is a selfish, unsympathetic man, skeptical and worldly in all things. Understand me, my child, this opinion has not been forced on me by this one violent act, it is the outcome of years of association with him, and is only irremediably confirmed by his part in to-day's tragedy. But you have decided. I merely tell you all this in case you may need help in holding to your decision.

"Don't deceive yourself, Helen. The women who marry bad, hard, or worldly men become bad or hard or worldly in the degree that they are allied to their husbands. Women grow down to the men they love and live with. Remember, dear, if you prove less strong than you think, and go with him, then you go down to his level, down to his hardness of heart and his worldliness of opinion. Don't, don't do this, lest you make a deliberate choice of evil."

Helen had risen while he was speaking, and as he finished, stood facing him. Suddenly, with a sob that echoed in the old man's heart till the end came for him, she dropped her face on her arms, crying:

"Oh, father, let me try to think he is right!" She was a woman after all, and her father gazed on her, puzzled—almost despairing.

There was a knock at the door, and he rose softly to answer it. When he came back to her and put his arms about her, he found that she had already regained her composure.

"Herbert is in the drawing-room, dear, and wants to see me. Of course he will ask for you, and it would be better for you to make up your mind fully before going in," he said.

"I am not going in, father; I can't. Tell him what I have said to you, and ask him not to—not to come back any more."

He kissed her and went out sadly. When he closed the door behind him, it was with fervent thankfulness of spirit; but he was as tender as a woman by nature, and his heart ached for his suffering child.

Helen had been, in her first development, exactly what he thought a woman should be, but lately there had been a touch—just a touch—of worldliness in her. The father, who idolized his children, was fain to look outside of them for explanations of their faults or shortcomings, so he had lately come to lay at Girard's door some things that belonged there, and many that should have been placed at Father Adam's.

With his hands in his pockets and his back to the mantel, Girard stood awaiting Mr. Lawrence. There was no suggestion of nervous excitement manifest in

the lithe strength of his figure, but the keen gray eyes were intense. When Mr. Lawrence entered and held out his hand, a look that might have been reflected from a sunny boyhood lighted the younger man's face. He came forward eagerly, saying:

"I thought you might refuse me this, sir, but somehow you always manage to take me by surprise."

The old man motioned him to a chair.

"I have shaken hands with you before, Herbert, and you were much the same man as now. Sit down. I have something to say to you."

"Mr. Lawrence," said the other, without waiting for him to proceed, "I have come around to tell you that I am ashamed of the way I did to-day——"

"Well, I'm glad you have the grace to say so," broke in the old man, in astonishment, "but I'll just tell you what, my boy, that's far from enough—far from enough. A man must be something more than 'ashamed' of sin!"

"Why, you didn't let me finish!" put in Girard, hardening suddenly. "I meant to say that I am ashamed of having left you unprotected in that crowd—that I should have thought of your age, and helped you out of the press. But the fact is, I forgot everything but the duty I was there for, and I do assure you, sir, I see no cause for shame in my performance of that."

Mr. Lawrence leaned back in his chair and looked up at the man in shocked disapproval. There was challenge and answer as their steady eyes met, and

then the younger man said, with the air of dismissing an unpleasant subject:

“May I see Helen, please?”

A pause ensued before the old man replied:

“It is Helen’s wish that she should not see you again, Herbert. She has commissioned me to say so to you.” He wanted to say something to soften the blow, but there swept over Girard’s face a look which warned him to keep silent. It was only for a moment that the young fellow was betrayed into showing his feeling; in the next, pride and resentment rushed in and restored to him his perfect self-command.

“Is it Helen’s wish or yours?” he asked incisively.

“It is as I have said,” answered the old man—he was stern enough now—“but I agreed with her fully in her decision, and encouraged her to stand firmly by it.”

“It is unfair and unfeeling, and I won’t stand it,” Girard spoke quietly, but his eyes were like cold steel. “Your last statement shows that you have coerced her. I demand to know the whole of it.”

“Look here, Girard,” said the old man, rising to his feet in indignation, “if I had been willing to use coercion with a child of mine, you should never have entered this house as her accepted lover. Do you understand that? There has never been a moment in your whole life when you were good enough for her—never a time in which I have not feared that in giving in to your engagement for the sake of her happi-

ness, I had marred it, instead. You demand to know the whole of it. It is simply this: She herself decided to break this engagement; I encouraged her; and she does so now, through me."

Girard's strong face was white with something more than anger as he answered:

"My engagement is with Helen. I refuse to take my dismissal from anyone else. Have I not the right to speak in my own defense, sir?" he asked with an unexpected note in his voice.

The shot went home. There was unfeigned appeal in the father's voice as he answered:

"I know that her heart will follow after you, Herbert, but her conscience is arrayed on the side of right. You mistake if you measure my child by other women. You cannot change her opinion, so why distress her with your violence? Why——?"

"Why keep her from me, sir, except that you know that I can and will change her opinion?"

In answer the father put his finger on the bell-button, and the two stood silent till a servant answered the ring.

"Tell Miss Helen that Mr. Girard is anxious to speak to her." With his hand on the door-knob, Mr. Lawrence paused and waited his daughter's coming. "Girard," he said finally, "I want you to remember that you are to abide by the decision she makes to-night, for I do not intend to allow you to persecute her."

"I make my own——" but the lawyer stopped as

the servant re-entered the room, and handed a slip of paper to Mr. Lawrence. The old man opened and read it, and passed it to Girard.

"I beg of you both to spare me this," was what it said. Girard crushed the paper in his hand, and after one long look into the eyes of the man before him, left the house.

When he had gone, Mr. Lawrence went to find and comfort Helen, and he held her none the less faithful that she cried as if her heart would break when he took her in his arms.

Yet it was not in response to a sense of duty that she acted when she broke her engagement to Herbert Girard. Greater than anything else, for the time being, was the overpowering horror of the fateful scene in which he had taken such a dramatic part, and horror of the man himself who could play it. Alone in her room that night she faced the vivid tragedy in all its hideousness, and lived over in imagination every agonizing detail of the scene.

That the prisoners represented an organized band of assassins which threatened the very government of the city paled into insignificance before the fact that they had knelt and prayed for mercy in vain.

As far as Helen was concerned, Girard alone was responsible; and in her imagination she attributed to him all the cruelty that his act held for her. His hands were stained with blood, but that it was the blood of the guilty did not, to her mind, render the stains less deep.

She knew that if she should meet him she would shrink from him as from any other blood-stained thing; and she knew that she loved him. That was the part she could not understand—the part that made her feel guilty with him—the part that made her fear him. To her distorted imagination the shadow of a great crime enveloped her, and she was groping blindly and passionately for escape.

CHAPTER THREE

BY THE HELP OF SAINT JOSEPH

ONE afternoon, not long after the tragedy at the Congo jail, Girard closed his office and took the first car for the park. He had been there many times lately, and anyone who chose to watch his movements might have seen him almost any afternoon walking restlessly back and forth under the moss-draped trees.

It was late when he arrived. He usually came late, for he liked to have the cool, green, shadowy acres as much to himself as possible. A short walk took him to the spot he most often visited, and he slackened his pace and resigned himself to its weird enchantment. It was the dueling-ground of old New Orleans—a spot where one, who is not too matter-of-fact, may easily conjure up the ghosts of a score of fine gentlemen who held honor a thing to die for. Here on the field of conflict, with daylight deepening into shadow, and reality fading into illusion, one might almost feel revive in him the faith of the old order of things; for the place is forever haunted by the shadows of beliefs that are past, but not forgotten. But nature drapes her battle-places. Lo, a far-stretching sweep of marsh-grass, sentineled here and there by gray-bearded giants of the forest; and yonder, in the far distance, starred waist-deep with palmettoes!

There is no red on the grass blades now, no click of parried steel beneath those mighty trees; only the green expanse, the moss-draped oaks, and memories of courtly days that shall know them no more forever.

But the young man who now wended his restless way in the green twilight was native to the soil and to its traditions. To his sympathetic understanding the broad acres of verdant field and native forest were eloquent always of the indomitable spirit of his fathers, and he came to them for sympathy, in that he was what he was. He, too, had dueled here—he and fate. Indeed, the struggle was on between them still, and he was as ever grimly determined not to yield a pace.

But there was small chance for a passage at arms to-day, for in a few steps more he found that he was not alone in his favorite haunt. From somewhere, evidently near at hand, came a noise as if someone were cracking nuts with unusual industry and vigor. His first sensation was that of resentment, but the glimmer of a white dress through the leafy perspective roused his curiosity—it struck him as rather late in the afternoon for a woman to be there alone. He stooped his way among the giant branches that dipped the lawn, and was soon within a few feet of the intruder.

It was Zoe, seated on the ground with her back to him, busily engaged in pounding one stone upon another. She had not heard him approach, and as Girard coughed to attract her attention, she started

and looked around. He paused for a moment, in uncertainty, but she smiled in the old way, so he went up to her.

"What is it you are murdering?" he asked. "You surely haven't been finding nuts in April." She tossed away the stone she had been pounding with, and disclosed, on the upper face of the other, what looked to Girard like a piece of battered tinfoil.

"That's my little Saint Joseph," she said, with a queer, composite expression of face. "He doesn't look like himself, does he?"

"Well, hardly; I don't believe Saint Mary herself would recognize him in that state." He knelt down on the grass beside her, and Zoe continued ruefully:

"And just to think! Helen squandered thirty-five cents on the little devil, and went all the way to Saint Roch's to get him!"

"What has he been doing?" he asked, with an amused smile.

"It's what he has left undone," said the girl; "that is—but I'm afraid I have misjudged him—what shall I do?"

"You can't put him together again, that's plain," he laughed. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't do that for you now. Do you know," continued he, half-laughing, half-serious, "I'd hate to be a friend of yours and have you 'misjudge' me!"

She looked at him directly for a moment, then dropped her eyes again to the flattened saint. The humor of the situation was lost on her.

"You have ruined yourself with him, Zoe," he continued, still bent on teasing; "you'll never get a husband now, as long as you live."

Zoe was by this time tenderly tying up all that was silver of the little saint in the corner of her handkerchief, but she looked up in fine disgust, and said:

"You're just like all the rest."

"All the rest of which?"

"All the rest of the men. The last man of you thinks that it is the one aim and object of every woman's existence to get one of you."

"Well, isn't it?" he asked, with an intentionally exasperating show of surprise.

"Not in every case," she retorted. "I think you and I know *one* exception." The smile died out of Girard's eyes and he looked away under the trees.

"How is she?" he at length asked. His whole face changed with the reference to Helen, but Zoe was still cross.

"She's gained ten pounds since the fourteenth of March," said the little vixen. "And she has such a good color now! She's going to a house-party in the Virginia mountains soon."

He tried to look her in the eyes, but Zoe immediately began to fish for doodles. Long experience with her had taught him not to believe more than half she said, but he was always puzzled as to which half to credit. He was inclined to believe her last statement now, and a bitterness he was too proud to call heart-ache, for an instant threatened to unman him.

It would have taken a more agile understanding than a mere man possessed to keep up with Zoe's moods. Suddenly she leaned forward and said—mockingly, he thought:

"I was mean to say it. She really looks perfectly dreadful; I believe she is going to die." Girard got up and dusted his knees savagely.

"It is time for young ladies to be indoors," he said shortly. "Come, we'll catch the next car."

"You didn't bring me here, and you're not going to take me away; at least, not until I get ready to go"—and she seated herself on a bench near by. "What's the matter with you, anyhow?" she demanded.

"What is the matter with *you*?"

"Nothing," said she, in an injured tone, "and that's all the thanks I get for coming out here and waiting two blessed hours to see you! Yes," she went on, answering his look of dazed astonishment, "I prayed to Saint Joseph to send you here this afternoon, and I came out and waited and waited and *waited*—till I thought you'd never come. Then I got mad and smashed him. It was all your fault, and you don't appreciate it a bit—you're as mean as——"

"Why, Zoe, I didn't know a word about it. How could I?" he broke in. "Did you really want to see me?" he asked, coming up to her, and trying by tones and gestures to make amends.

"Yes, I did want to, but I don't *now*."

"Please don't do that way. What was it all about?"

"It was about Helen; but I don't believe you really want to hear!"

"You know better than that," he answered. Zoe looked up, and caught a quick change in his face.

"What is it about—Helen?"

Zoe hesitated. "Why," she said, at length, "I thought maybe I might do something to help you. I know, of course, that you couldn't mail anything to her—but I thought if you'd like, I might carry——"

The ghost of a suppressed smile made him look cynical, but his face grew grave and impenetrable as he said:

"She wouldn't care to hear from me."

"You mean you don't care to write."

"Well, yes."

Zoe stood up. "There's just time for us to get to the gate before the next car comes," she said carelessly. "There really wasn't anything about Helen, except that she has no idea what I've done, and would be furious if she knew." It was Girard's time to linger.

"It was good of you to do it, Zoe," he said quietly, "but you don't understand."

"No," she answered, "I don't understand—you. Come on, or we'll get left."

"Let's take the next car, there's plenty of time. What is it you don't understand about me?" Zoe paused in impatience.

"I don't see how a man like you could turn coward, for one thing."

"Apropos of what?"

"You know well enough. But there is always one explanation."

"If you will give me that one explanation, perhaps it will throw some light on the subject for me," he answered.

"Why, there is the supposition that you really don't care, you know. I think it fits your case exactly, now that I come to consider it."

"But I do care." Nothing in the world could have induced him to voluntarily discuss this subject with Zoe, but the name of Helen had made his throat tighten suddenly with a dull, hard ache, and he could not keep back the answer.

"I wonder how much," said Zoe. She, too, had become grave.

"All that the world holds for me."

"Then what made you surrender without even a show of fight?"

"I have not surrendered, and I don't intend to."

Zoe's black eyes shone. "I admire your determination," she exclaimed, "but I must say you have displayed poor generalship."

"What would you have done?"

"I? Why, I'd have climbed up to her window that very night and carried her off bodily. And if father had pursued, I would have stood up in the buggy and shot him."

Girard did not dare to laugh. He and Zoe were old-time enemies, but she had been good to him this

afternoon, and he was anxious to keep on friendly terms with her.

"But I didn't have your head to think with," he replied idly.

"It wouldn't hurt you to think with your own," she returned, "try it."

"I have tried it."

"And you came to the conclusion——?"

"That she shall come to me."

Her eyes traveled over him critically. "You are not as *big* a man as I thought you," she said.

A dark flush surged up his sun-burned cheek. "She dismissed me without a hearing," he protested.

"You don't know Helen."

"I have been engaged to her since her day of short dresses."

"Yes, but you've never met her."

"I know her better than anyone else does. Hasn't she always been like clay in my hands? Has she ever before taken a stand against me?"

"Yes, but you were seventeen times as old as she, and lorded it over her from the start; besides, she always thought you right. She—she—oh, you don't know Helen! You see—really, Herbert, you've no idea what you've got to contend with—there's Outraged Ideals and Family Honor and True Womanhood—well, now, if you have got to assume that shocked air with me, I'll just——"

"Don't, Zoe, please don't. I didn't mean to make you mad."

The wind veered around to another corner.

"I suppose—under the circumstances—it would not be safe to tell me."

"Why, yes, I will tell you," he exclaimed, the fire springing to his eyes. "I will tell the whole world that there is not power in it to take from me the woman I love. She is mine and I will have her in spite of him. I will have her in spite of—herself."

Zoe's narrow eyes opened in astonishment.

"Herbert," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "I'm going to kiss you for that, if it kills me!" And before he had time to recover from his astonishment, she had sprung lightly up on the stone at his feet, laid her hands on his big shoulders, and kissed him resoundingly.

"Bravo!" he cried. "I like to see a girl take her life in her hands like that. Wa-a-it," he pleaded, holding her by the arms and glancing swiftly around to make sure there were no lookers-on; "can't you give me another little tiny one—for *lagniappe*, you know?" Zoe looked at him for a second, then dropped her eyes and pulled away.

"Come on," she called, and she darted across the level green toward the gate. They were soon outside, and as they stood there his face grew grave again.

"Zoe, there was something about Helen, wasn't there?"

"Yes," she said, speaking low, for others had come up, "she pretends to be all right. And during the day she works around the house and makes believe to be

bright and cheerful—but at night, when she thinks I'm asleep, she just cries and cries.”

He looked quickly away. The car stopped, and he helped her on, but he talked little on their way back to the city.

Alone in his room that night, Girard decided to change his tactics. He had escorted Zoe to her father's gate in spite of her protests; and after a lonely dinner at the restaurant, had returned to his apartments early, though the night was hot and sultry.

His room was large and contained everything that money could buy for a man's needs, but there was not the merest suggestion of home comfort about it. It was eminently a place for a man to stay away from.

No attempt had been made to beautify it in any way, and apparently very little to reduce its chaotic state to order.

To Girard, there were only two kinds of women: Helen was one, and his landlady was the other. That “other” had early learned the fact that bachelors don't know what they want, except in the matter of something to eat, so, in the young lawyer's apartments, though everything had its place, everything was systematically out of place—everything, that is, except his match-box; he was positively fierce about that. In a very few minutes after his arrival, Girard had cleared the center-table, very much to the disadvantage of the dresser and several chairs, and had deposited writing materials on it. In a few minutes

more, coat, cuffs, and collar had been jerked off and thrown on the bed.

The windows were wide open and his table was near one of them. The man sat down by it, and remained some minutes looking out into the night. Below was the noisy, shifting city, a type of fever and unrest and unfulfilled ambitions; but above stretched the quiet sky, like a promise of eternal peace.

In the past few weeks Girard had found time for many thoughts that had hitherto been crowded out of his brain. Helen had been his promised wife from the time of her schooldays to the fateful day of reckoning with the Mafia. So long had possession of her been a comfortable certainty that he had dropped into an almost husbandlike way of taking things for granted, and of expecting her to do so, too. Now, there was time to think and to feel how much she had meant to him. No other woman's love had come into his life—no other love at all, except the undemonstrative comradeship of men. There had been much in his life to make him harsh, but he had never been so to Helen. There had been much in his experience with men and women to make him cynical, but he trusted her. She was the only one whom he had ever allowed to love and pity and caress him, and these days that knew her not were very lonely.

Rousing himself suddenly, he drew the paper to him and wrote without pausing again:

“My precious darling,

“I need not tell you that I cannot live without you, for you

must have known it all along. What have I done that you should keep me from you? I followed the dictates of my conscience, and performed the duty that I felt to be mine. Would you have me do less? Could I have done less, and still have been, in any way, worthy of you? Let me come to you, Helen, and tell you all about it, and then if you don't see things as I do, and don't understand,—surely you can trust me, and nothing else matters.

“Nothing really does matter, darling, but our love for each other. I have found that out in these weeks of heartache, and I have the faith that you know it, too. I realize now that life is meaningless without you, and that even the struggle and the cruelty of it are welcome, when they are met for you. Fate was never kind to me, Helen, except when she gave me you, and if you are to be taken from me, all the rest is unatoned. I have had a hard fight, little girl, for the world is against the man who meets it empty-handed, but I have won out. But what does it all signify, if it is not for you! What is the good of the struggle and the sacrifice, if what they have won is not for you! I am thirty-four years old now, and I have never had anything like a home, except the empty house I bought for you, and the picture that I have carried about in my heart ever since you gave me the right.

“I don't know what they have told you about me, Helen,—and indeed they might tell you many bitter things that are true—but there's another side to some of them; and to some—God help me—there was at least a struggle before the failure came. This they cannot know. In justice, let me come and tell you all. You are the only thing in the world that I love and trust implicitly; and you will not—you must not—fail me now. I love you, my own darling, with all the love that other men give to many, for you are the only one I can call my own.

“HERBERT.”

After that he undressed and flung himself into bed, and dreamed all night of home and Helen.

No woman had ever told Girard that he ought not to write to a lady on business paper, so when his

letter was delivered the following day at the Lawrence home, the envelope bore his firm name in the corner. The mail was handed to Mr. Lawrence first, and when he gave Helen her letter, a look of pain crossed his face. It so happened that Helen was just then in a state of deep repentance for having hurt her father by an impatient word; and, besides, he was looking old and feeble to-day, and the girl's loving anxiety was aroused for him. She saw the shadow cross his face when she took the letter, and she walked out on the back porch with it in both hands, like one in a troubled dream. When she started to break the seal she was near the kitchen door, and she turned suddenly and went in and put the letter into the fire, unopened. A moment after, and she was doing her best to rescue it, but it was too late, the coals were white-hot.

In five seconds the flames had licked up what it had cost Girard so much to write. He was a reticent fellow, and rarely unbosomed himself even to Helen, but he had poured out his whole heart to her in this that was now crumbling before her.

Still, in those very ashes there was comfort for Helen. The sharpest pang of all for her had been the fact that Herbert could remain away and be silent. Now she could know, at least, that he had not forgotten.

Then came the tempter; and she was torn between a determination to martyr herself to what she conceived to be her duty, and a desire to write and tell

Herbert that she had destroyed his letter and was sorry. That fierce old fight—the struggle between training and instinct—was on for Helen now; and it had lost none of its cruelty from the numberless hearts that it had rended, through all time.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

IT was midnight in the Italian Quarter. In a certain narrow, ill-paved way it was uncannily dark. The street lights had gone out—but whether through some human agency, or because they preferred not to witness the scenes there enacted, were hard to tell.

A suggestion of mystery lurked about the deep alleys that led off into darkness; it looked down on the passerby from tiny rooms that jutted over the sidewalk; it waited for him in every musty, black arcade. From every forbidding-looking door that pierced the stretches of wall, from every dark, twisting outside stair, Danger beckoned the curious with an allurements that is hers alone. The narrow sidewalks, with their loose and broken paving stones and their abutting architectural excrescences, seemed but a tangible suggestion of intangible perils. The stagnant slime of the open sewers and the fever-tainted atmosphere cried out a warning of a like moral uncleanness; while the shadowy piles of unsightly habitations that rose on each hand against the steel-blue of the midnight sky but typified in their crumbling rottenness the decay of the race they sheltered.

Far down the darkening way where the shadows seemed deepest, a faint light shone out of some sort

of arched way across the sidewalk. Now steady, now flickering—always dim—it struggled but a short way against the outer darkness, then seemed to surrender and become one with the shadows.

The place was so dim, so quiet, that a huge gray rat stole out from underneath a rotten shed, and began a tour of inspection. First he scurried along the sidewalk under cover of the darkness—then, growing bolder, he advanced into the light of the arched doorway. Beyond stretched a tunnel-like arcade from which the light issued. He entered. Bricks underneath his scampering feet, bricks up the sides of the walls he attempted in vain to climb, an arched sky of bricks above him! This was disappointing. He would go back to the garbage-littered paradise he had quitted. But even as he essayed to return, a shadow occupied the entrance, and sent him flying through the curtain of grapevines that almost obstructed the other end of the tunnel.

A woman entered the arcade—a woman whose mien was so full of stealth and suspicion she might easily have been the reincarnation of the gray rat that had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

She was on no tour of inspection, but her steps were noiseless as she limped into the arched tunnel and knelt down before a crucifix that hung against the wall. A touch to forehead and breast and shoulder and shoulder, and then the woman stood up and examined the two dripping candles which burned on a bracket at the feet of the image, and which furnished

all that there was of wavering, uncertain light amid a world of enveloping darkness.

Apparently satisfied with the inspection, she turned and limped back to the opening through which she had entered. Careful to step aside that her form might not long be silhouetted in the dim light, the woman took up her stand immediately outside, and looked forth through the night with a gaze so intent and so incisive that it must have pierced the very blackness. The sharp face was thrust forward, but the plane of her vision rose no higher than a certain deep doorway on the front of a shadowy house across the street. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, but not once did the weight of the tense figure shift to the other foot. A riotous gust of wind twisted off the mantle that covered her head, but she allowed it to be whisked away and dropped into the gutter unheeded. A crawling, winged something flew against her face, but she brushed it away without start or shudder. Five, ten, fifteen minutes she watched the dark doorway. Was she hoping for or fearing the thing that should issue thence?

A sudden spasmodic flickering of the light announced a burnt-out candle inside, and the woman hastened in, mumbling to herself:

“La Società is long meeting. La Società has many affairs to-night.”

After a hurried bending of one knee, she drew out a fresh candle from a pocket in the folds of her skirt, and lighted it by the flame of the one that still

burned before the crucifix. The yellow, seamed hand clinched spasmodically as it fixed the newly lighted candle on the shrine, and the half-whispered, half-hissed torrent of words that rushed from the withered lips had more the tone of anathema than prayer.

For some moments the woman stood still, watching the new flame struggle for existence and mumbling to herself, then suddenly the light was blown out from over her shoulder, and a vise-like grip fastened on her arm.

"Diego?" she breathed in a startled whisper, and she bit back the scream that sprang to her lips.

"Diego, Diavolo!" whispered a man's voice in reply. "Did I not say no lights here to-night?"

The woman tore off his grasp from her arm. "Oh, Santissima Vergine! Lasciami andare." And in a voice more fierce than his own, "Did *I* not say these flames should ascend till Sansoni's blood be washed out in the blood of his assassino? Ah, Diego, Diego! What says la Società of *him*? Tell me. Tell me true. I watch, I wait here hours and hours to know."

"I tell you—nothing!" he hissed.

"Va via, scellerato, birbante!" she choked. "You have not demand he die! Sei un bambino! You linger, you hesitate, you wait, and the red-handed Americano walks these streets unharmed!"

"Zitta-a-a!" he commanded, "l'Americano strikes back. L'Americano is unafraid."

"L'Italiano hesitates to strike back; l'Italiano is *not* unafraid," she taunted.

The man crept closer to her in the darkness.

"Forget you so soon, mia madre? Have we not received their warning, if one of them suffer death through la Società, we are massacred—all?"

"I—forget—not—the moan of the dead limb from which Sansoni's lifeless body swung. Hist! It is sounding now!"

"Pazienza!" he whispered, striving to quiet her. "We will have revenge."

"'Pazienza,'" she flung back at him; "'pazienza,' while the devil that hanged my son goes free?"

"Zitta!" he whispered again, shaking her violently by the shoulder. "Leave Girardo to me." There were a few minutes of dead silence, and the man's voice began again. This time it was purring, conciliating. "Carlandrina? mia madre. What news?"

The woman struck off his hand with a blow as effectual as it was unexpected, and escaped in the darkness, flinging back at him in mockery:

"Leave Carlandrina to *me!*"

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Two hours past the midnight mark, and a faint light again shone out of the arched way across the sidewalk. Now steady, now flickering—always dim—it struggled but a short way against the outer darkness, then seemed to surrender and become one with the shadows.

CHAPTER FIVE

SHADOWS CAST BEFORE

ONE afternoon, some three weeks after Zoe's interview with Girard, Mr. Lawrence came home before his usual hour of returning, but early as he was, he found his two pets already awaiting him. Zoe opened the heavy iron gate that admitted to the yard, but a ragged old St. Bernard bounded in front of her and was first at his master's feet.

"Go way, you old dickens! You nearly knocked me down!" she flashed out angrily.

There had been a vendetta between herself and the St. Bernard for ten years, and the cause was not hard to find: Cyrus never lied to the old man in word or act or expression; Cyrus never failed his master at the least crisis; Cyrus always rendered him unquestioning love and obedience—but not so with the girl. And on account of this very fidelity of his—itsself a reproach to her—Zoe hated the dumb brute heartily.

On the part of Cyrus, the enmity was not so active. Zoe was a piece of the master's property, he understood, so he did not hesitate to whip any neighborhood dog that came too near to her. Nevertheless, he reserved the right to growl at her, himself, whenever she displeased him, and to dislike her always, instinctively.

"I have told you to quit calling Cyrus bad names,

Zoe," said the old gentleman, as they walked toward the house. "You are worse than Frank about picking up ugly words. Where did you get that expression?"

"That's one of those dreadful things 'born in me' that auntie is always telling you about, when she thinks I don't hear," replied the girl.

They took their seats on the front gallery, and Zoe soon had his white locks dancing in the breeze of a big palmetto fan.

The grounds were larger than is usual in the city, and formed a picture of tropical beauty with their wealth of magnificent palms. The roses had bloomed themselves out—for it was nearly June—but the cape-jasmine bushes along the fence were white with their wax-like blossoms, the Spanish-dagger was holding aloft to the sun its stalk of snowy bells, and the great magnolias were in full flower.

"It's 'you and I together, love,'" said the girl caressingly. "Auntie and Helen have gone to take dinner with Mrs. Dupont, and Frank said not to expect him back, so you are *mine* to-night."

The grave, white-haired man and the radiant girl had a queerly sympathetic tête-à-tête that evening. Zoe was in high spirits in consequence of having him all to herself, and the old man resigned himself to her caprices of mood with a loving pride in her very waywardness. He talked little himself, but he listened and laughed, and Zoe chattered to her heart's content.

In rising from the dinner-table the girl broke a piece of china—the most valuable in the house, as luck would have it—so she lingered in the dining-room to bribe the servants not to mention the accident to Miss Susan. When she followed Mr. Lawrence into the sitting-room, she found him with his pipe filled, ready to be lighted.

“Why don’t you smoke cigars, like Frank and Herbert?” she asked, as she knelt on his footstool and held a burning match to his pipe.

“I am not as rich as Frank and Herbert,” answered the old man, for want of something else to say. “By the way, my dear, considering that Herbert is nearly twice your age, I think it would be better for you to call him ‘Mr. Girard.’”

“Well, you see—I—don’t want to, father. He’s too conceited for anything now. I call him ‘Herbert’ to show him how insignificant he is.”

“He is not likely to be very much humiliated by you, Zoe, and I prefer for you to do as I say.” His tone was final, and Zoe knew that obedience would be required, but she was not in any better humor with Girard for being thus compelled to treat him with the proper respect.

They talked for some time after that, the old gentleman taking little part in the conversation, but answering usually with a smile or a caress. Gradually she grew thoughtful, too; and after a little, drew her stool closer, and laid her head on his knee.

The big clock on the mantel ticked louder and more

uncompromisingly; the sounds of household industry gradually ceased; the two were alone in the summer evening quiet.

At length the old man raised her gently from his knee and said thoughtfully:

"I have tried, my dear, but with no success." He answered the question in her heart as naturally as if she had given it words, and continued, "I went through my papers thoroughly last night, even taking them all out of the desk for the purpose; but the package that came with you was not there. I had at last made up my mind to open it."

"Father, I never could understand why you didn't open those papers at first."

"Why, I had no sane reason for not doing so, my dear—I feel now that I had none. My idea then was to separate you entirely from what must have gone before you—to let you start even—as it were. I know the human heart so well that I was afraid the others—that I myself—might not be able to remain perfectly unprejudiced toward you if we read what was contained there." He paused for a moment, then looking at her wistfully, asked, "Have I been such a poor father to you, child, that you should constantly be trying to find the one who threw you away?"

The girl hesitated.

"You don't understand, father," she said, in a puzzled attempt to express what she did not herself seem to comprehend. "I don't care for him—I—I'm trying to find *myself*, don't you see?"

He did see, through his sympathetic love for her, and he stroked her hair as she stumbled on.

"You don't know what it is to walk down these streets and watch the faces of the different ones you meet for an explanation of yourself—to tell yourself every time you draw aside with contempt or horror, 'I may be one of them.' It's like going up to a looking-glass when you are by yourself in a room, and shrinking from what you see there."

Suddenly a look of concern clouded the old man's serene blue eyes, and he leaned forward, taking the girl's chin in his hand and raising her face to the light. In his eyes she had always been pretty, but the dusky beauty of her face, with its eyes of black velvet and its lips of poppy red, was now a revelation to him. A closer look still, and the old man suddenly sank back in his chair, white to the temples.

"You are scared now, yourself," she cried in a startled whisper, "did you see a ghost in my face?"

"It's just a little faintness, dear," he explained, rallying with a struggle. "I'm all right now—all right."

In spite of his protestation, however, the old man seemed far from "all right," even after he had drunk the glass of sherry which Zoe quickly brought for him, and the girl watched him apprehensively for some time. At length she laid her cheek against his shoulder and stroked his wrinkled hand.

"Tell me again what you did that night when you found me on the front steps, father," she said to dis-

tract him, for the white stillness of his face affected her strangely.

He pulled himself together like a man waking from a troubled dream.

"Why, I picked you up and brought you into the house"—he was making a visible effort to seem natural, and the girl grew more anxious still—"and I dumped you, basket and all, right down there in the middle of the floor. Then mother and your auntie and I had a long talk over you as to what we should do with you. We had about decided on the orphans' home, when you opened your little old black eyes and held out your arms to me."

"Mother and auntie wanted to send me away—you wanted to keep me," she interrupted.

"Who told you so?"

"Mary Agee said her mother told her that auntie told *her* that mother didn't want me a bit, and that she—auntie, I mean—gave you a piece of her mind on the subject. But you kept me, didn't you?"

"Yes, I kept you," he said, reflectively, "for you settled the matter by cuddling down in my neck when I took you up. I told mother we would keep you and give you a fair chance, if we could. And then mother washed you till I thought she would take all the color out of you, and we put you to sleep in the cradle of the baby that died."

"And I've been such a bad, bad child to you—I'm so sorry." She raised her penitent eyes to his, and her lashes were heavy and sparkling. "I do try

to be good sometimes—oftener than you all give me credit for—and then something makes me mad, and it all goes. I was just *born* bad, and I can't help it."

The old man smiled indulgently.

"You were just born with human failings like the rest of us, Zoe, and eighteen years is a short time in which to conquer them."

"But I'm ten times worse than the others, father, you know that, yourself, though you always make excuses for me. I—I—tell stories, and say bad words; and when I get mad with anything, I want to kill it—I want to *torture* it." She put both hands on his knee, and facing him directly, forgot her characteristic trick of veiling her eyes. Her spirit seemed to come out from behind its strong intrenchments to meet the open truth of the soul before her.

"Father, I am *afraid!*"

"Afraid of what, my child?" said the old man, startled at the change that had come over her.

"Of myself—of something in me that takes possession of me and makes me worse than itself. I don't understand it, and I can't tell you, but you can imagine, can't you?—feeling sometimes like your very soul was fighting for its life?"

"My soul has been fighting for its life for three-score years and more, Zoe, and the battle would have been lost long ago but that I have a good Captain and have stuck to my colors. Now, listen to me, Zoe. I know your faults better than you, yourself, do, and I have every faith that with the help of the good

Captain, you will conquer in the end. It takes the whole of any life to win its battle, dear, and you must not turn coward or traitor in the very beginning. You have an unfortunate disposition, Zoe, and you must learn to control it, that's all. And, my dear, you must stop torturing yourself with so many imaginary horrors. I wonder you have any nerves left. You foolish child, you," drawing her to him and kissing her, "to be afraid of an evil spirit that has been exorcised, many and many a time, by a number two slipper."

They were silent for some time, and then the old man said:

"Don't you want to sleep on the couch in my room to-night?"

"Yes, sir," she answered in an eager voice, and he was borne out in his judgment that she was in no fit mood to be left by herself that night.

"Well, get your things and get ready, dear, it's high time you were in bed. Run on." Zoe stopped a minute and then said, hesitatingly:

"Come, go upstairs with me to get my night-gown. It's so lonesome up there."

When they came back, Mr. Lawrence lighted the gas in his room and rolled the couch up by his bed.

With a restful feeling of security, she saw him take a big arm-chair by the light, and unfold his evening paper. In a short while a slim white figure came and knelt down by him, and the old man lowered his paper and spread out his hands in blessing on her head,

while she said her prayers at his knee for the first time in seven years.

“Good-night, daughter.” He answered to her kiss, then, as he held her hand a little, “Remember that the Judge of all our shortcomings keeps it in His blessed memory that we are dust.” She looked at him wistfully.

“Daddy, I wish *you* could be my judge when the last day comes.”

“I shall be witness for your defense, Zoe, and I am not more merciful than my Father.” He kissed her again, and she slipped off to bed with an expression of quiet peace on her face.

The old man did not take up his reading again; and when her measured breathing told him she was asleep, he rose softly and crossed the room to her bedside. Leaning down over her, he lightly drew back the tresses that shaded her brow, and for a long time studied the lines of the sleeping face. When he rose at length, and turned to the light, it was as if another decade had been added to him in those few silent moments. Care and sorrow had walked with him for years, and he had gone hand-in-hand with them like a familiar friend; now, all at once, they seemed to have turned upon him and borne him down. It was a broken and troubled old man that paced the floor that night, striking his withered hands together, and moaning to himself, “My God—for those papers! it must be—must be so.”

CHAPTER SIX

THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN

“**H**ELEN, you are *too* good.”

It was a sunny afternoon in June, and the two sisters had gone out to Carrollton Gardens for a stroll through its tangled wilderness of flowers. Nobody stays indoors in New Orleans, when he can get outside. The two were sitting on the grass in one of the shadiest nooks, watching the shadows lengthen. They were evidently deep in serious talk, for Zoe had pushed her sailor hat back from her forehead, and was emphasizing her words with a vigorous forefinger.

“I know I wouldn’t be a goose if I could help it,” she continued, trying vainly to catch and fasten the stray locks that the stiff Gulf breeze tossed about.

“You don’t understand how father and I feel about it,” began Helen.

“Yes I do, too. I understand very well how you feel about it, and I see, too, how you are trying to deceive yourself. As for father—well, he doesn’t have to marry him. If Herbert drank or gambled or did anything like that, I’d think father was perfectly right. But all this foolishness about ‘ideals’ I don’t intend to try to understand!” The older girl smiled sadly, and Zoe continued, “I’ll honor bright about it, I

never could stand Herbert, myself, but he answers very well for a man; and it does seem to me that anybody that wants him ought to be allowed to have him." She paused a moment and her eyes kindled—"And a runaway match would be just grand!"

"Run away from father!" exclaimed Helen, who had been deep in her own thoughts and had caught only Zoe's last words. "You wouldn't do it, yourself, you know you wouldn't."

"Yes I would, too, as quick as lightning. But I'd run right back again, bless his dear old heart!"

"But I don't want to, Zoe, I don't want to marry Herbert now." Zoe looked at her in high disgust.

"Leave that kind of thing to me," she said, "you are not talented enough to do it naturally." Helen crimsoned under the sting, and her adviser continued:

"Now, if Herbert had sent you that letter instead of mailing it, as I told—as—I would have done, father would never have seen it, and you would have read it and answered it, too."

Helen looked at her sharply, with a pained expression on her face.

"Zoe, did you say anything to Herbert about writing to me—that evening he came home with you?"

"Of course not. What do you take me for?" A shadow of relief came into Helen's face, and Zoe hurried on, "I'll tell you what to do. Suppose you and he correspond till you come to your senses. I'll carry all the letters back and forth. I wouldn't treat a dog as you do him, I declare I wouldn't."

"If I wanted to write to Herbert, do you suppose I would have to keep father from knowing it?" Helen asked, loftily.

"Well no, not necessarily; he wouldn't tie you to the bedpost, of course," said the other, "but it would save all manner of hurt feelings and family consultations. Now there would be no end of a fuss, if I told them how Frank has taken to kissing me behind the scenes instead of before them all, since he came back, wouldn't there?" Helen raised her head quickly, and looked at the girl before her in shocked amazement.

"Why, Zoe, I am ashamed for you."

"Well, I'm sure I'm much obliged to you. I suppose I should have done a little vicarious blushing when I saw you kiss Herbert good-night, that time, but it really never occurred to me." Helen would have given something to know how much there was behind those long dark lashes, but Zoe sat with her eyes on the ground.

"Do you mean to tell me that you and Frank are playing at sweethearts?" the older girl demanded.

"No," said Zoe, looking directly at her with a flash of her own indignation, "I don't mean to tell you that Frank and I are 'playing' at anything." Helen's spirits visibly lost ground before the rise of the other's temper, and she said almost appealingly:

"Why, Zoe, he is the same as your brother!" Zoe had risen to shake the grass blades from her dress. She looked tall, almost imperious, to the girl on the

grass, as she clasped her hands behind her and answered incisively:

"It's because he is *your* brother, Helen, that you object. But not every woman is as bloodless as yourself—remember that." And she turned on her heel, and walked away across the green space to where the shrubbery soon hid her from view.

As in her father's case, the realization that Zoe was a woman grown, was a wrench to Helen's accepted view of things. Indeed Frank, himself, had been up to the present time nothing but a boy to her. Through the eyes of Herbert Girard she had come to know the woman in herself; but, always, out of his presence, she had gone back to her foolish youthfulness with "the other children." It was as if she had clung to the past with one hand, while she stretched out the other to the future. Now, all in a moment, childhood had slipped out of her clinging fingers, and the future had come suddenly, menacingly near. Zoe had called herself "a woman"—Zoe, "the baby"!

For a long time Helen sat pulling at the grass blades about her and trying to fathom the depths of her repugnance to the things which the other had disclosed. She tried to make herself believe that it was the shock of having to readjust in her own mind, Frank's and Zoe's relation to each other that so discomforted her; but she was accustomed to being honest, even with herself, and she found the task difficult. At length, abandoning all attempt at self-deception she acknowledged to her own heart that Zoe

was not the woman to be her brother's wife. Helen knew, as the older members of the family knew, that there was some fatal lack in the character of the girl who had so mysteriously come into their lives. Incident after incident came up before her mind now, in substantiation of her decision; but with these came also many tender recollections to plead for the little alien. There is no charm in earth or heaven to soften like the memory of a happy childhood, and in a few minutes a repentant girl was searching through the gardens for the "little sister" she had wounded.

"Father will attend to all that," she told her troubled heart, "I must not quarrel with Zoe."

It was not until after a long search that Helen found Zoe; and when she came upon the girl in a thickly wooded part of the park, she was surprised to find that she was not alone.

The younger girl was standing with her back to the walk as Helen approached, and was talking rapidly to a forlorn-looking female who carried, strapped around her neck, a tray of some sort of pottery.

At the sound of Helen's step, the woman looked up quickly. Zoe turned at the sudden movement, and came to meet Helen, while the stranger hurried off in the opposite direction.

"It's the same old story," said the girl, with an unusual note in her voice, "but somehow, I feel that this one really needs. Hand me the pocket-book, I want to give her something."

"I don't like her face, Zoe. I don't like the way

she slunk off," said Helen, in puzzled disapproval. A quick discussion followed, and at last Zoe said:

"But I broke one of her little plaster figures, Helen, I ought to give her something for it."

"Why didn't you say so at first?" and Helen promptly opened the purse. Zoe took out a silver dollar and darted down the overgrown path after the disappearing image-vender. To Helen's surprise she did not return immediately, but lingered some minutes in conversation with the woman.

She was very pale from her run when she returned, and Helen noticed with contrition the excited unrest in her eyes, which seemed not to have abated since their quarrel. They were, by this time, in a little stream of people who were hurrying to catch the cars to town before dark, and Helen could only press her hand and say:

"I am sorry I was so cross with you, honey."

What a pity it is we are so constructed that one mean little idea, liberated by the careless tongue of another, can grow and grow, like the genius of the fisherman's box, till it fills all the earth and all the heavens for us. On their way home that afternoon, Helen had become more and more possessed by the thought that Zoe had said something about her to Girard to call forth the letter he had written. With that, all the sweet comfort that its unopened pages had brought took wing, leaving only inexpressible mortification behind.

'Yes, without doubt, Zoe had appealed to him.

That was what made him write,—he would never have done it, otherwise. They both believed she was breaking her heart for him’—and she felt that she would never outlive the shame of the thought.

Last night she had nearly made up her mind to answer Herbert’s letter; now she decided conclusively never to write to him again.

The green avenues stretched out interminably as the car glided on, for heartache can prolong infinitely our waking moments of suffering, even as a cruel dream can lengthen one throe of fancied pain into a seeming long, long agony. The sight of home with its beauty, its comfort, and its apparent peace now stabbed her like a promise broken; a wild little minstrel mimic, rightly called a “mocking”-bird, trilled the postman’s whistle at her from a flame-tipped pomegranate tree where she had long carefully guarded the nest of his mate. The green, kindly old world had lost its power to charm.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIKE SIRE, LIKE SON

HELEN'S first impulse was to go straight to her father with what Zoe had revealed concerning the state of affairs between Frank and herself, but her native sense of delicacy interfered. While it was imperative that her father should know the truth, she felt that it was not her place to tell it. She knew Zoe too well to hope to influence her to a course which demanded a degree of moral courage, but she felt that she could take high grounds with her brother, so she went to him with a plain question.

It was unfortunate for Helen that she had no tricks of dissembling. She must have shown in her manner of asking how very distasteful the idea of his engagement was to her, for Frank's hot temper was aroused at once. He told her promptly that he was engaged to marry Zoe, and intended to do so as soon as he was established in his profession, without waiting for her consent or anybody else's.

Helen had a quick temper, too, but she tried to control it as she asked, "But father, Frank; you've told him—you're going to tell him at once, aren't you?"

"I am certainly not going to tell him till it's too late for him to make a scene," replied the young fellow, promptly. "Now look here, Helen, you stop

trying to regulate me. I'm a man, and it's just as well for you to begin to understand it." With that he walked off, leaving Helen hurt and bewildered.

After several days of mental worry, in which her objections to her brother's engagement were constantly strengthened, Helen decided to go and talk the matter over with her aunt.

"She'll be obliged to know, sometime," thought the troubled girl, "besides, she is a woman and can understand." Indeed, for once Miss Susan was the best help to which her niece could have appealed. She "understood" as Helen had thought. She understood Zoe, and so was prepared to sympathize with Helen's view of the situation.

The father, with his tender leniency, was scarcely the one to share Helen's uncompromising condemnation of Zoe's faults, and Frank would have fiercely resented his sister's attitude had she told him her objections. A man in love is easily deceived, and the young fellow, who had been five years abroad, fondly imagined that Zoe, the woman, had outgrown all the faults both slight and great that had been so apparent in the little girl.

So Helen reasoned that neither her father nor her brother was prepared for what she had to say; besides, she was ashamed to tell them all she knew. There is in all women—in all refined women—the instinct to shield any woman from any man's contempt—the instinct to hide from the other sex any little and contemptible trait a sister woman may possess. Miss

Susan had felt this, too, and long ago had shrunk from telling her brother-in-law or her nephew about finding Zoe reading letters which were not intended for her perusal, or listening at doors closed for privacy; and Helen had told her things equally distressing. So it was that Helen now confided in her aunt.

"I feel so contemptible, so guilty," she said, after she and Miss Susan had talked it over together. "Frank will never forgive me, and Zoe will hate me bitterly, but I would rather see them dead than married to each other."

Her aunt was disposed to take a less tragic view of the situation.

"Of course," she assured her troubled niece, "my sister's son must never be allowed to marry a child of the gutters with no blood at all. But that can be more easily managed than you think. During his five years from home, Frank has had time to forget what he knew of her faults, or to imagine them outgrown. He needs only to know the whole truth, and that will end it. I am sorry," she continued, "that your father ever sent him to Europe. If he had been here all the time, he would have known her too well, and would have felt too close to her. But to leave her a child, and find her a woman, and such a pretty woman—ah, there's where all the trouble comes! I must speak to your father about it, at once."

"Will father see it as we do, auntie? He is foolish about Zoe."

"I am sure I don't know.—He must," said her aunt

with emphasis. "Your mother and I begged him at the beginning not to bring in an alien among you children, but the child held out her arms to him when he opened the basket she came in, and he would not hear to parting with her. Now the Hopkinses and Lawrences have always been the best people in the country, and—go tell your father, Helen, that I want to see him." Helen rose to obey, then sat down again beside her aunt, with a look of indecision on her face.

"Auntie, there is something I want to tell you, first." Her heart was thumping rapidly, and the color crept up into her face. "I know I must be contemptible, I must be as bad as she—or I wouldn't feel so like a criminal for the part I have played; but I think you ought to know, and father ought to, and I want you to tell him on us both."

"Helen, what in this world do you mean?"

"It's just this," the girl answered: "Night before last I woke with a headache and went to Zoe's room to get the camphor. The moon was shining in at the open window, and when I looked at the bed, I saw that Zoe was not there. At first I thought she was in the room, somewhere, and called her name, but she didn't answer, and I began to be scared. Then it occurred to me that she might be walking in her sleep, and I got a candle and started to find her. It was the night you were sick, and I went as softly as possible to keep from waking you. She was not upstairs anywhere, so I slipped downstairs to look for her. I went through the drawing-room first and found the door;

which leads from the back drawing-room into father's study, half open, and a light shining through it. I know I ought not to have done it, but I put out my light and stole up to the door."

Miss Susan was sitting up now in wide-eyed interest, and Helen leaned closer to her with a frightened look as she continued:

"She was in there, auntie, at father's desk. She had the keys, and had it open, and was going through his papers. At first I thought she must be asleep, but when she looked around toward where I was, to listen, I saw that she was wide awake. Then she turned to the desk again, and I felt myself grow cold to see how slyly she refolded each paper and put it back without making a sound. I can't tell you how I felt, but when she locked the desk, and blew out her candle and started toward me, I was dreadfully, awfully afraid of her. It was like seeing the dead walk. I shrank behind the curtain and waited till she had passed me and gone upstairs. Then it was that I went to your room and told you I felt bad, and asked you to let me stay with you. You remember?—Auntie, what could have made me *afraid* of Zoe?"

"The evil in her," said Miss Susan, in a stern voice. "Helen, what could she have wanted in your father's desk?"

"Not money, surely; father gives her all she wants. Do you suppose she could have been looking for his will?"

“No-o-o. She must know that he has provided for her. It was not that. Look here, Helen, it *was* the will! That girl was trying to find out about your brother’s property. Go ask your father to come here at once.”

Helen escaped from the interview between her aunt and her father, and stole off by herself into the cool, austere shadows of the front drawing-room. She was far from being satisfied with her own generalship of affairs; and in her pitiless self-analysis she blamed herself for having yielded to the momentary temptation to watch Zoe, almost as much as she blamed Zoe for her deliberately planned act of dishonor.

“Who am I that I should sit in judgment on her?” she thought, as she covered her burning face with her hands.

After what seemed to her hours of waiting, she heard the door of the sitting-room open, and her father come out into the hall. Something told her that he wanted her, and she sprang to her feet and hurried out to him.

He was standing in the hall like a man who was waiting for—he knew not what; and there was a look on his face that she had never seen there before. Helen was struck silent, and she felt a sense of suffocation come over her. How could she know he would take it like this? What had she done? What must she do?

“Send your brother to me,” he said, at length, and the voice was strangely unlike his own. Without an-

other word he re-entered the study and closed the door behind him.

With the feeling that the commission was a punishment almost commensurate with her transgression, Helen went to look for Frank. After a long search, she found him asleep in the summer-house. She gave him her father's message as briefly as possible, and hurried away, for the happy look on his face gave an added sting to her conscience.

After receiving his father's summons, Frank took his own time in stretching himself awake, then rose leisurely and sauntered into the house. It was the dreamy effect of the poppy-laden Southern June that made him slow to answer, rather than any dread of the interview. The young fellow's life had been clean, and there were no ghosts of hidden sins to rise up before him and make him fear the rather ceremonious summons.

When he entered the study and found his father, white and haggard, leaning against the mantel, he was at once deeply concerned.

"Sick, father? What's the matter?" he asked, going over to him quickly.

"Sit down," said the old man, waving him away, but not unkindly. "Frank—my son—I have just learned from your Aunt Susan of your engagement to Zoe. What have I done that I should be deceived by my children?"

"Why, father," exclaimed the young fellow in surprise and contrition, "I never dreamed of your con-

sidering it deception, you know. Zoe will tell you so, herself."

"If you had only come to me first, son. If you had only come to me first!" groaned the old man, scarcely heeding the reply. He was walking up and down the room, now, locking and unlocking his fingers in a strange excess of emotion.

"Why, you see, sir, a man hardly does his courting that way—at least in this day and time."

"Ah, my son, is marriage such a trivial thing that it may be rushed into without a moment's reflection?"

"It is generally settled by the contracting parties, and in their own time, isn't it, sir?"

"And most madly, most foolishly so."

"If I know anything of family history, father, you and mother did your own planning without the aid of outside assistance."

"But your mother was not Zoe."

"*Sir!*"

"Don't answer me in that tone, Frank. Am I not your father?"

"Most assuredly, but I seem to miss your fatherliness to-day."

"My boy, my son!"

"Of course I don't mean that, father, but I don't understand you," Frank hurried on to say.

"Then let me make you understand me, Frank. Your mother was a woman every fiber of whose being had been proved in generations gone. There was no taint—no shame or weakness in the heritage that she

gave her children. This girl—I must and will say it—what can there be behind such an advent as hers but moral rottenness and shame? What?” The young man recoiled under the force of his words—then rallied with indignation.

“What do I care, sir, what her origin was, so long as the girl herself is all right?”

“That is the point, son. How can that be all right whose origin is all wrong?”

“Is this your Christian doctrine, father? Could the God you have pointed me to, deal so unfairly, so cruelly with His own?”

“God, my son, deals directly only with the isolated, the naked soul of man. All the rest, though under Him still, is guided by the immutable laws He has established. The laws of race and heredity are unchanging and unchangeable. We may cry out against them, but we must submit. It is man’s part to see that his race is kept pure.”

“You are right from your standpoint, father, but I don’t think you have the proper view of the case.”

“What is the proper view, Frank?”

“Why, that people will be all right if their surroundings and training are what they should be.”

“Then why do you waste my money on blooded horses and dogs?”

“I—I said ‘people,’ sir.”

“Can you give any good reason why the laws that run through all the stages of animal life should stop at man?”

"No, none except that that would be—in reason and justice—the right course."

"Not unless you give man the power to make his own surroundings, and dictate his own training from birth." The young man was silent. His father came over to him, and looked at him earnestly.

"Do not deceive yourself, son; environment and training can only develop or modify that which nature has implanted—they cannot create. You would not be my son if the pride of race were not instinct within you,—if this appeal did not reach you."

"You don't know me, sir!" cried his son, almost fiercely. "Even if you were right, I would choose to live my own life for myself, without regard to any other!"

"No, you will not do that," answered his father. "You can no more isolate yourself from thought and regard for the future than can any other man. You may be determined to persist in this marriage, but it is because you hope and believe everything will turn out well; that my objection will prove to be founded merely on a fantastic theory."

"Well, however that is, I shall marry Zoe, so for the Lord's sake let that end it!"

"My son, you shall not." His voice broke as Frank had never heard it break before, and there came over his face such a wave of anguish that the young man felt his own throat fill.

"You surely can't mean what you say, father. If you will only think it over, you will see how cruel—

how——” he did not finish, for the distress in his father’s face stopped him.

“I do mean—just what I have said, Frank, and I tell you that this thing shall not be. She is not fit to be my son’s wife. She has the instincts of—she is not honorable—she is not truthful.”

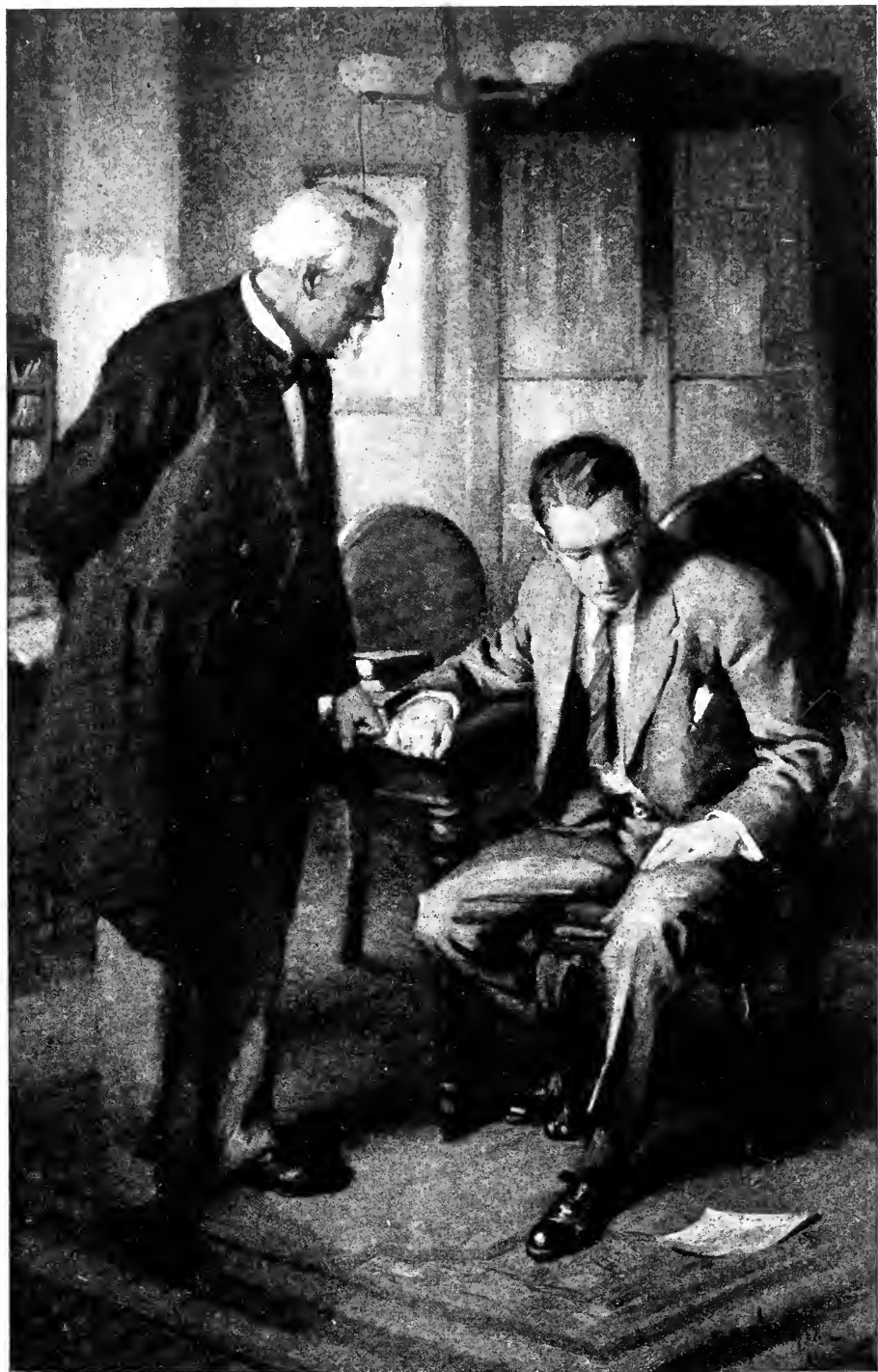
“Why, sir,” exclaimed the young fellow, springing to his feet in proud resentment, “you mistake your rights! I shall allow no man—not even my father—to say anything against the woman who is to be my wife”—the father turned and looked into his eyes. There was a change in the young man’s tone when he continued, “I know Zoe’s little faults as well as you do, but they are only faults; and you ought not to call them by such hard terms”—something made him change the subject quickly. “Don’t you see, sir, how unreasonable, how futile it is for you to object like this? Why, even if I were willing to sacrifice myself to your prejudices, I could not, would not, sacrifice Zoe.” Another look from the sad eyes of his father, and the son almost broke down as he concluded, “You loved my mother, sir, so tenderly,—I am sure that, after a while, you will understand.”

The old man paused before him. His son’s words had given him the courage he lacked.

“Because I loved her, Frank, because I love her now, better than all else,—is why I must save her child—even though I break——”

“‘Save me’! Why, father! Zoe is not—is not——”

“My son—she is not—*white*. Oh, I would have



"MY SON — SHE IS NOT — WHITE."

spared you this if you had let me!" he cried. The young man sank on a chair and covered his face with his hands. There was deathlike silence between them, and then the son staggered to his feet with all the youth blanched out of his face.

"Do you know this, sir? Can you prove it? My God!"

"I believe it as I believe my own existence. I—I must find those papers about her."

"Father, you did not suspect when——?"

"When she came to us? Need my son ask that question?"

"When—first?"

"The other night. I saw it in her face. And now so many things are made plain to me—the girl's own character—her—— My God, for a solution of it!" he groaned. "I have tried to make her what she ought to be—but I have failed, failed! I thought I was doing right, for I prayed for the Master's guidance through it all. I thought that He pointed me to the path I took; and lo, in my old age and infirmity, I am groping in the dark! I have felt His hand in adversity, in hardship, and in pain; I have recognized His presence by the bodies of my dead, but I cannot see Him here!" He sank into a chair and his head dropped back against the cushions. His son sprang to him and put his strong young hands on his shoulders.

"Father! Father!" he cried, trying to give the consolation that he needed so much himself, "don't

take it like that; it—it will come out all right. And you may be mistaken.”

The father turned his head wearily and looked into his eyes.

“No, my son,” he said after a long searching gaze, “I am not mistaken; but it will come out all right—somehow. You’ll soon take my place here, and you must see that it does. You inherit the consequences of my mistakes. God help you to bear them rightly. Frank, my son, we cannot change now—here at home—it would be inhuman to separate her from us after all our——”

“Of course, father.” The young man’s hands tightened on his shoulders in sympathy.

“And if she should get over this, and want to marry someone else, you must tell her—and him, but otherwise, this must not pass your lips.”

“Yes, father.”

“And you will remember always that she is to be your *sister*; you will remember, my son.”

“Yes, sir, I will remember.”

Immediately after dinner that day, Frank betook himself to his room, drawing apart from his kind with the instinct of a wild creature that has been wounded. Ever since his interview with his father that afternoon, he had been fighting one thought away from him as if his very sanity depended on his exorcising the evil thing. But man knows no charm by which to lay the troubled ghost of thought. The horrible thing

was there—there always—crouching in the shadows of his mind, cruel, relentless; and ever and anon it would creep out and possess him, and all things else would be blotted out.

In vain had he sworn to himself that he would not believe. *His father believed.* That fact stood apart from all other facts in the universe in terrible emphasis.

“I must find you those papers about her,” echoed and re-echoed in his memory. *His father had read those papers.* This his almost frantic mind fastened on and accepted as a truth, when the old man had been far from intending to make any such impression. His father now proposed to find the papers which would prove that horrid truth to him, the son. Like a child that sobs out a promise to be good when it sees the birch raised for another descent, his writhing spirit cowered under the menace of that disclosure and cried out its surrender. He, too, believed; but to have that belief assume the form of a hideous verity was what his spirit could not bear.

In vain did he determine not to look down upon the unfortunate girl. A fierce racial antipathy, an all-conquering pride of blood, poured into his soul from the centuries, and inspired him with loathing for what he feared her to be.

“Zoe was—good God! he could be alone with it no longer!” Snatching up his hat, he hurried out of the haunted room to take refuge somewhere in the crowded streets.

"Frank, I want to speak to you a minute." He had gained the hall door when Zoe's voice arrested him, and sent the blood surging to his heart. He turned and looked at her.

She was standing in the door of the drawing-room. The light from the chandelier, shining on and through her yellow organdie dress, gave her dark beauty a setting of gold. There were yellow roses on her breast and yellow roses in her coal-black hair.

For a moment an overpowering sense of her beauty swept over him, in the next, a feeling of repulsion possessed him, and he had to fight with all the strength in him to keep it from gaining visible mastery over him.

"Do you like me?" she asked, with a bewildering smile, "I had it made just as you said; but you can't imagine what a time I had getting the color you wanted."

"It is awfully pretty," he answered mechanically. She held out her hand to him, but he turned and fumbled a minute with the night latch on the door, then followed her into the room. Zoe did not take any one of the half-dozen convenient chairs about her. She paused where the light fell on her, and kept her velvety eyes on the young man till he sank on the sofa, and looked up at her expectantly.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," she echoed, musically, sinking on the seat beside him. She was very close to him, so close that the scent of the roses at her breast floated up to him,

and the crisp airiness of her skirt crushed against his knee.

"What is it?" he asked, fighting against the enchantment of her presence.

"Why, you know, dear"—she clasped her hands over his shoulder and laid her cheek against it—

"Wait till I shut that window, the flame will break the globe!" He got up abruptly, and went over and closed a blind that was letting in a stiff breeze; when he came back, he did not take his seat again, but stood on the hearthrug with his side-face toward her. Zoe laughed, and took up the conversation again, as if there had been no interruption:

"It's just this, dear, I've been thinking the matter over, and I feel positively silly at the idea of being 'engaged' to you. You—you are almost my brother, you know, or always have been, and it a—a—upsets things in my mind for us to be sweethearts, don't you see? Somehow, I can't help feeling that we've both been making-believe"—she slipped a small ring from her finger and held it out to him—"It's foolish to keep it, Frank, feeling as I do, don't you think so?"

"You are right," he said hoarsely, but he made no move to take it.

Zoe rose and glided up to him—close—very close, with the small circlet in her extended hand.

"Throw it away!" he exclaimed desperately, and he rushed from the house, slamming the front door after him.

Zoe picked up a quaint old vase from the mantel,

and stood looking intently at it as she heard his steps recede. The sound of his quick tread on the gravel came in to her through the open windows, and the click of the gate-latch seemed unusually loud. As the last echo of his footsteps died away down the sidewalk, she raised the vase over her head at arm's length, and shattered it on the tiles at her feet.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CRIME OR CATASTROPHE?

THAT the family relations had received another painful strain, was evidenced by the constraint of all parties at breakfast on the next morning. Mr. Lawrence was grave and silent. Miss Susan, not yet having learned his decision in regard to the matter that had been laid before him, was distinctly cross. It had always been a thorn in that lady's flesh that her brother-in-law did not discuss family complications with her at length, and yesterday he had added another to the sum of his sins against her by receiving her confidence with the silence of a sphinx. Helen had passed a miserable night between the pangs of conscience and the growing conviction that Zoe must see there was trouble gathering and suspect her part in it. Zoe had never borne a reputation for intellect, owing principally to the fact that she could not, or would not, learn her lessons when at school. Helen, however, had always recognized the fact that Zoe possessed an incisiveness of mind that could cut its way where reason halted; and she felt, rather than knew, that nature had given the strange girl that instinct she usually reserves for creatures which cannot reason. So, instead of eating

her breakfast, Helen sat pale and listless, wondering how much the girl sitting opposite her suspected.

Frank did not appear at all; and there was, throughout the circle, a distinct feeling of relief at his absence. Zoe, however, was in her place promptly, and was, as usual, the most vivacious member of the party. She was unusually bright and chatty, and very nearly kept up both sides of the conversation; but the undercurrent of deep pity for her, made her very liveliness an added pang to the others. To Helen the pang was keenest, for she saw, or fancied that she saw, in Zoe's bubbling spirits, the mask of an intense nervous strain.

Another fact that added to the constraint of all, was the knowledge that that was the day for the father's weekly visit to his plantation. Mr. Lawrence was, and had always been, the one to calm the troubled waters in his household; for wisdom gained by ripening years and coupled with abiding tenderness, can command to stillness even the tempests of the heart. With all, now, there was the feeling that his very presence was an earnest of peace, and that his absence would be most unfortunate.

He was usually absent two days on these trips; and so methodical was he, that Friday never came without finding him equipped for the journey. When the day was bright, he rode horseback; but when it rained, he made the trip in a time-honored buggy which every other member of the family scorned. But riding or driving, old "John," his favorite horse, was always

his companion. Often Zoe would beg him into taking her with him, and would revel like a wild thing in the freedom of woods and fields.

Mr. Lawrence left the breakfast-room, and Zoe followed him to the front gallery. As she passed out of sight of Miss Susan and Helen, her manner changed quickly, and when her father turned to see what she wanted, he encountered a pitiably miserable face.

“Daddy, *take* me with you.”

He knew very well what this meant. In the days that had gone by, she had always tagged at his heels whenever Miss Susan had spanked her. And though he had never failed to assure her he ‘was glad she had a dear auntie that loved her well enough to punish her and make a good girl of her,’ he had always carried her around in his arms after these crises, and showed her “pretty things,” till she forgot Miss Susan’s painful demonstration of affection.

“What’s the matter now, honey?” he asked in the old-time way.

“Nothing at all, but I’m just not going to stay in this house with auntie and Helen—they’re so mean and hateful. Father, ple-a-s-e!”

She hung round his neck, and the old man looked down into her pathetic face in an agony of soul such as comes to few. He loved her with a sorrowful tenderness. If he had felt, at any time lately, a natural repulsion to the alien strain he now suspected in her, none but he and his God had known, and they had set-

tled it between them. The awful—the tragic—possibilities of her future overshadowed every other thought, except that he had stumbled fatally, even as he had raised his hands in prayer for light. To think of having followed any course other than the one he had taken with Zoe, was impossible to him. But the way that he had chosen, and the consequences that might follow it,—alas, the bitterness of it all!

The girl was clinging to him as to a last hope, so he roused himself and replied:

“I am not going to the plantation to-day, dear.” She looked up in surprise, for it had been many a Friday since he had failed to go. “No, I have an engagement to meet a man from out of town on business; but I am going to-morrow, and you may go with me, if you wish.” Her unhappy face brightened instantly.

“Now remember, you have promised, and you won’t go without me, since you’ve promised,” she said warningly. “You’ll be back to lunch, won’t you?” He shook his head.

“No, I will be too busy. Now look here, dear, you must not quarrel with your auntie and Helen; remember you are not infallible yourself.”

“Father——”

“Well, dear—well, child, what is it?”

“I’ve got something to tell you when you get back—remind me—help me to do it.”

“Poor child, I know already!” he thought; and his heart ached because of the pain he must give her;

but he would spare her that unendurable hurt he had not been able to spare his own son.

"Well, promise me to be a good child while I'm gone," he answered. And after she had promised, he kissed her good-by and left.

Zoe stood on the steps and watched him till the down-town car carried him beyond her view, then she turned to the house with a quick sigh. In a few minutes she was back again, with her hat and gloves on.

"Sallie," she said to the housemaid who was ostensibly sweeping the front gallery, "if auntie asks you where I am, tell her I've gone to spend the day with a friend—you hear?"

Sallie rested her constitutionally-tired hands on the top of her broom-handle, drew a long breath, and replied to the point:

"When you goin' gimme that shirt wais' you got on?"

"None of your business. You mind what I say."

"Goin' give it to me soon's you git back?"

"No-o—yes—maybe so," waveringly, "and say, Sallie, don't tell her anything till I'm way out of sight."

"Co'se I ain' goin' tell Ole Miss nothin' she ain' got no business to know," she answered assuringly; and mistress and maid parted in mutual understanding and satisfaction.

Helen and Miss Susan were in the sitting-room when Zoe's message was delivered fifteen minutes

later, and the latter lady's temper was in no wise improved by it.

"Now that's a pretty come-off!" she exclaimed. "What's a body to do with a piece like that?"

"I suppose she has gone over to spend the day with Bessie Fitzpatrick," said Helen, coming to the rescue. "I don't blame her for not wanting to stay with us."

The door opened and Frank came in. He was looking very much more of a man this morning, for the seriousness of his countenance gave him a dignity that his youth had heretofore denied to him. He declined to sit down, but stood idly by the mantel as he answered the usual questions about breakfast and early mails. He had evidently come in for a special purpose, but after the first few remarks were exchanged, an awkward silence ensued. At length Frank crossed the room, and seemed about to withdraw, but he paused, with his hand on the doorknob, and turned to them.

"I want to tell you," he began, after clearing his throat several times, "that Zoe has broken the engagement between us. She did it entirely of her own accord, and it will not be renewed. Please don't let's have any more discussion of the matter, now or hereafter." With that he closed the door behind him, leaving the two women looking at each other in dumb surprise.

Miss Susan was the first to recover breath.

"Will somebody please tell me what she's up to *now*," she exclaimed.

"She didn't mean it, poor darling, she just did it to test him." Helen's voice was strained, and she fled from the room, leaving her puzzled aunt looking over her spectacles.

"It's all sister's fault," wailed the old lady to the surrounding silence; "I begged her not to marry, and if she had only taken my advice, these poor children would never have been in all this trouble!"

Zoe returned in the middle of the afternoon and retired at once to her own room; but later, when the family assembled on the front gallery, she came down among them looking fresh and dainty in a crisp white dress. She declared that her morning had been delightful, and had a thousand little interesting nothings to tell about the Fitzpatricks. The group hailed her talkative mood as an escape from their own uncomfortable thoughtfulness; but their evident efforts to be natural with her, only made their attitude toward her still more strained and artificial.

Suddenly their attention was attracted by cries down the avenue. For a moment it seemed to be but a burst of overflowing life from the crowd of noisy children that inhabited the streets from breakfast till bedtime; but the group on the veranda soon became conscious of a note of panic in the rising sound, and all except Miss Susan hurried to the steps to learn the cause of the excitement. Cyclers were scattering from the road, and gayly dressed, beribboned children were scrambling over the iron fences. Two nursery-maids crowded into the Lawrence gate with their charges

just as a runaway horse dashed into view. A moment more and they saw that no vehicle was being dragged behind the frightened animal, but that he had strapped on him a man's saddle.

Suddenly, to the amazement of the family, the mad creature dashed up to the gate, and, thrusting his head far over it, snorted and whinnied as if in one supreme effort to speak.

"It's old John!" cried Miss Susan, with a scream. "Frank, your father!"

But Frank had seen, and was already hurrying across the lawn. There was a struggle to unfasten the heavy iron gate which always got refractory at the wrong time, and then Frank, with his aunt and Zoe at his side, pressed out to examine the quivering animal.

Old John, ordinarily the most quiet and tractable of his kind, was still intensely excited; and though Frank had laid hold of his bridle, he reared and plunged and pressed against the fence, giving them small chance to look at him. The crowd in the street and the servants from the house had congregated around the unruly creature, and their excited chattering only added to his terror.

"Frank!" called Helen's voice from the veranda—the ring in it made every one look up—"I have just telephoned to the stable, and they say that father got John and left there for the plantation about twelve o'clock."

"Lawd God! sump'n done happen to him, an' ol' John done come back to tell us about hit!" groaned

Aunt Rena. "Look here, Mr. Frank!" She gave a lick at the horse that sent him away from the fence and disclosed the right stirrup. Down the saddle-skirt on the side and on the stirrup were small, but unmistakable, splashes of blood.

At the sight, Frank sprang into the saddle, whirled the excited horse in the direction from which he had come, and galloped away without a word.

Two men in a buggy who had stopped and heard what was passing volunteered to follow the young fellow to see if they could assist him, and the crowd reluctantly began to scatter.

Then Helen had time to see that a little distance away Zoe had fallen to the ground and was lying quite still. She had apparently attempted to return to the house, but had fainted before she reached it.

Helen, the first to reach her, found her unconscious. Quick to think and to act, she took hold of the situation at once.

"Adele," she said to the little neighbor who was lingering around for more excitement, "won't you run and telephone for Doctor Nesbitt? If you can't get him, keep on till you get some other doctor. Don't, don't, auntie, she has only fainted. Tom, Sallie, come take her in. Not upstairs—to father's room. Aunt Rena, you must not do this way! How can I do anything when you hold on to me like that?"

Helen lost no time in having Zoe carried into the house. She worked hard to restore her to consciousness, all the while directing the servants how to help, and trying to quiet her aunt, who was nearly in

hysterics. Zoe did not rally under her simple restoratives, and Helen became more and more alarmed for her every minute. Never for an instant, however, did she forget her greater fear; but Frank had gone, and it was her place to stay here and work with Zoe.

She went to the front veranda and back again numberless times in the next half-hour, for her heart was torn between thoughts of the unconscious girl inside, and the father—she knew not where.

Every step on the walk, every unusual sound in the street, called her for one fleeting moment from Zoe's bedside. Then she would hasten back again. Hers was the one brave heart in that household. In the proportion that the others gave way, her courage rose to the occasion. There was need of a steady hand among them then, and the girl crushed back her own heartache, and rose to something of her father's masterful calm of spirit.

After what seemed an eternity, she heard Doctor Nesbitt's well-known tread on the gravel, and hurried out to meet him at the hall door.

"Father has had an accident on the Carrollton road somewhere, and I wanted you to drive out to—to—but you'll have to do something for Zoe first, she has fainted, and I can't revive her." All the while Helen was hurrying him to the room where Zoe lay.

The doctor felt Zoe's pulse for a moment, and looked at her intently, then he turned to Helen.

"You'd better 'phone Doctor Hatton to go to your

father—number 355. If he is not there, call up Fred Black.” Helen did as he bade her, with added fear, for she knew by his failing to go, himself, that he was greatly concerned for Zoe.

It took some time for Helen to get the number she wanted, but her call found Doctor Hatton in his office, and he assured her that he would take the Carrollton road without a moment’s delay.

When she entered the room again, her heart gave a great bound of thankfulness, for Zoe’s long lashes were raised, and her hands were moving restlessly about the pillows. Helen bent over the prostrate girl tenderly, but she drew back instantly and looked at the physician. There was not a sign of intelligence in the dark eyes, and Zoe had begun to roll her head from side to side.

Doctor Nesbitt did not answer her look. He watched Zoe for a few minutes more, with his hand on her pulse, then wrote out a prescription and handed it to Helen.

“Have that filled at once, please.” After she had given the order and returned to the bedside, he continued, “She has not been well lately, your father told me. Only yesterday he asked me to come around some time to-day and give her a tonic—he was very much afraid that she would have fever”—then after a pause he asked, “Has your sister been troubled or excited about anything lately?”

Helen looked at his kind face with its crown of silver hair, and, after a moment’s pause, told him that

Zoe had had a most unfortunate love affair which her father had lately broken off.

"I thought there was something behind," he said, "when I saw her condition. She is of a peculiar temperament, Miss Helen, and we shall have to be careful with the case. I'll send you a good nurse for her."

"She will be better when father comes," said the girl, her lips trembling.

The physician left shortly, saying that he would return in a few hours.

When he had gone, Helen slipped down on the floor by the bed and watched the lines of the sleeping face in an anguish of remorse. "Not every woman is as bloodless as yourself," poor little Zoe had said to her; and she shuddered to think of the cruel ordeal to which she had subjected the passionate girl. In the aspect that pain gave the circumstances, Helen saw them differently, but none the less darkly than before. What evil spirit could have possessed her that she should have been so unfeeling? All Zoe's forgotten graces trooped up to plead for the sufferer; and her faults, but a short while ago so all-overshadowing, sank suddenly back to the insignificance of childish weaknesses.

"I have been so hard on you, darling," Helen whispered to the ears that did not hear, "but I'll be better to you—I promise you I will."

The door opened softly and Mrs. Fitzpatrick came in and took a chair near Helen. While visiting in the neighborhood, she had heard the news of Mr. Lawrence's probable accident, and had come at once

to offer help and comfort. She did not ask any questions of Helen, for the servants and neighbors had told her the circumstances. She merely took off her bonnet and gloves, put up her glasses, and began to fan the sleeping girl.

In a few minutes the door opened again, and the maid tipped in and handed a card to Helen.

"He says he wants to speak to you jes' a minute," she explained, and went out, leaving Helen gazing at Girard's card.

Zoe was still quiet, so Helen left her to the care of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and hurried into the drawing-room.

Girard was walking restlessly about the room while he waited, and when she entered, came forward quickly to meet her. Where was now the deep repulsiveness with which her fancy had clothed him? There were no blood-stains on the strong hands he was holding out to her, nothing but an infinite tenderness in the eyes she had feared to meet again. He was the same big, forceful, lovable fellow that she had leaned upon so long.

"I heard that you were in trouble, Helen, and I came to help you." In the eternity of suffering compassed in the last hour, no one had thought of Helen. It had been hers to think for and strive to comfort all the rest; hers to plan, hers to act, hers to be strong for them all. Now here was a courage greater than her own, a strength in the presence of which she could afford to be weak. For a moment there swept over her face the pitiful signs of a struggle for self-

mastery; in the next, she was crying her heart out on his breast.

Instead of trying to stop her tears, he only held her close to him till the storm swept by. But when she was calm enough to listen, he said comforting, hopeful things that helped her to take heart again; and in a few minutes more she was able to tell him what she knew.

"Shall I do what I think ought to be done?" he asked.

"Yes, yes—the suspense—Herbert——"

"I know, darling, but it shall not be for long. Don't look so on the dark side of things, little girl. Your father doubtless hitched old John somewhere, and some boy untied him and gave him a lick that started him running. Naturally he came toward home. There are wire fences for miles along the road, and a whole forest of thorn bushes. A frightened horse might have torn himself in a dozen places in his panic." He would have liked to accept his own explanation. "Then, you see, when he got into town, the excitement caused by his appearance in the streets only tended to frighten him more, and that was the reason he gave you all such a scare. Courage, now," he said, kissing her tenderly; "it will all be straightened out in a few hours, and Mr. Lawrence will laugh more than anybody else, after it is all over."

She tried hard to look at it with his hopeful eyes, but her heart sank suddenly when the front door closed behind him.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SEARCH

WHEN Girard left Helen, he lost no time in going to a livery-stable and securing the best saddle-horse that could be had. But hurry as he did, it was well on toward nine o'clock when he rode out of the city limits and struck the hard road leading northwest. He had been on intimate terms with the Lawrence family for so many years that he knew the old gentleman's habits well, so he took the road which it was most probable Mr. Lawrence had traveled.

The full moon was rising, and by its light he eagerly scanned the riders he met. He stopped every vehicle coming from the opposite direction, with the same question, but the occupants were all strange to him and to the man for whom he was inquiring. None of them had heard of an accident or had seen anything of the search.

The plantation toward which Girard pressed lay some ten miles ahead of him, but not being a man to spare a horse, he rapidly abridged the distance.

When the first few miles were behind him, he found that he had the road practically to himself, and he ceased to be on the alert for signs of travel. The moon was well up, now, and the road before him lay like a broad white moonbeam fallen upon the shadowy plain. Across the miles of grassland were the wooded

marshes—a line of deep shadow—dividing but narrowly the silver green of the grass plains and the silver blue of the sky where they rose and dipped toward each other in the far distance. And from out that distance, the perfume of bay blossoms came sweet and heavy on the hot night air.

As he rode through the radiant silence, Girard was almost ashamed that his thoughts were so little with the old man and his probable misfortune. He was putting forth his best efforts just then to help his friend, nevertheless, his mind and heart were elsewhere than with the missing man. He was holding Helen to his breast again, her arms were about his neck, and his cheek was pressed against her soft brown hair. She was his again with nothing, nothing, to part them—for all sundering influence had been swept from between them in that supreme moment of surrender.

In the days of their engagement, Helen had always been shy and undemonstrative toward him, rarely yielding to caresses, and more rarely still, bestowing them. Only that once in their love for each other had she come unreservedly to his arms, and he quivered still from her touch.

He had always felt that if he could only see and talk with her again, all would be well between them. The pain of the separation had been as intense to him as the love he bore her, and the bitterness aroused by her dismissal of him—especially by her unexplained silence in regard to his appealing letter—was measured

only by the pride and reticence of the man. But a few hours before, he had thought that the gulf between them was almost too great to be spanned, and had felt that Helen would at least have much to explain, before it could be accomplished. Then he had learned that she was in trouble; and lo! there was not one drop of bitterness left in his heart. There was nothing for her to explain—nothing for which he wished her to apologize. She was again the same dear girl who needed him; and he had gone to her, and taken her in his arms.

Suddenly he awoke to the present, with all its suggestion of catastrophe, and urged his horse forward.

Within about two miles of his destination stood the combination cottage and store of an old woman whom he chiefly remembered by the hard cider she sold to thirsty hunters. It was with something of a sense of relief that he saw this familiar landmark come into view, for it reminded him that the end of his journey was near at hand. He was anxious to have the doubt settled, though manlike, he always hoped for the best and rarely crossed a bridge till he came to it. Even had he been more vitally interested than he was, he could never have suffered as did Helen, on the moonlit porch eight miles behind him, for a woman forecasts the future by her fears—a man, by his hopes; and therein, at least, is man wiser than his mate.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the store, the road narrowed to a lane which was shut in on both sides by trees and underbrush, and which dipped in

the middle with a long sweep where it crossed a bayou. Here, for some hundred rods or more, the road was low and damp and the uncut growth that flanked its sides was in tangled, semi-tropical profusion. Girard knew every foot of it well, for this cool, shadowy lane had been a veritable oasis to him from many a summer sun. To-night, however, as he approached the long tunnel-like stretch, it did not seem so inviting. The moon was throwing into bold relief some thunder-heads that had come rolling up from the south, and afforded only fitful glimpses of the scene.

He soon realized that he would need a light in order to see anything of the road before him, or to recognize anyone whom he might meet. He was on the point of turning back to the store for a lantern, when he suddenly changed his mind. A light would reveal very little of that tangled, leafy way, he decided, and time might prove to be a valuable factor in the problem in hand. If he met anyone, he could soon ascertain if it were Mr. Lawrence or Frank by asking a plain question; if he did not, he would keep straight on to his objective point and find out the facts at the plantation. All the while, he kept telling himself that Frank had already been there and was now on his way home by another route. He was about to enter the lane, when the neigh of a horse close in front startled him to an alert position.

“Who are you, friend?” he asked as he advanced, leaning over his horse’s head and straining his eyes.

There was no answer except the violent pawing of the unseen animal.

In an instant Girard remembered the grudge that the Mafia owed him, but at the same time, he reflected that he was "in for it," anyway, if trouble came, and he promptly made up his mind to learn the whole truth.

"Speak, now, or we'll see if we can't make you," he said. He was unarmed, as he usually was, but he forced his horse forward. At that moment, a cloud that had been before the face of the moon, broke and drifted away, and a thread of light streamed through an opening in the boughs above him.

A few paces beyond stood a large horse apparently tied to a tree. He was saddled, but riderless, and as Girard came nearer, began to plunge madly and to jerk at the bridle by which he was fastened.

Suddenly a gleam of recognition shot through Girard's mind.

"John," he said, in a soothing tone, "Whoa, boy." In an instant the animal quieted, and stretched out his nose toward the voice he knew with an appealing whinney. Girard rode up to give him an assuring pat and to examine him as closely as possible in the uncertain light, when both old John and the horse he was riding suddenly started with fright and crowded against each other, nearly crushing Girard's leg between them. In another instant Frank's voice spoke to his father's horse.

"John," he said, "John, be still, sir."

"Hello, Frank! What news? Anything wrong?"

"Everything, Girard! Father can't be found." He came up to the lawyer's horse and grasped the saddle-horn tightly. "He has not been to the plantation at all," he continued, and the excitement in his voice made him talk like a man who had been exercising violently, "yet the woman at the store over there says he passed along this road somewhere after two o'clock to-day, and stopped at her place to get a drink of water. She says that he dismounted there and led his horse down in this direction—that she saw him enter this lane; but nobody on the road beyond has laid eyes on him."

Girard knew as well as Frank did that Mr. Lawrence was well known to all the scattered dwellers by the road, and that his passing was hailed with delight by every little freckled-faced urchin that the wayside produced.

"You started the plantation people on the hunt, of course?"

"No, only Dawson. But the two farmers that live beyond here are both out with their boys. They are going through the country about here, now. Dawson and I thought we would not let the negroes know yet. He thinks that maybe——"

"It seems to me," put in Girard, quickly, "that the place to look is right here in the vicinity of this lane. Mrs. Gillespie says she saw him come in, and——"

"That's what I know," said the wretched fellow,

“and we have been over the ground a half-dozen times. Still, I can’t keep away from the place, so I left the others and came back. —Girard——” and the excitement in his voice made it husky again, “when I rode out here this afternoon, John wouldn’t come beyond where you see him now. I never knew him to cut up before, but he behaved like the devil all the way out; and when we got here and I tried to make him go on, he reared and pitched till I couldn’t stick on him. I got him by the bridle and tried to lead him, but I couldn’t make him move a step; so I tied him here and walked through——” he stopped short without lowering his voice.

“Did you find anything?” quickly.

“Well, not at first. I thought he was at the plantation, and went straight on there. But when I came back and looked carefully, I found something very suspicious. Down there by the bridge are the tracks of a horse, wild and irregular—like—like—there had been a struggle.” He dropped his head suddenly on the horse’s neck.

Girard swung from his saddle and made the bridle fast to a tree.

“We must get a lantern,” he said, “and look again.”

“I have one here,” answered Frank, “but it went out and I didn’t have any matches with me. I was just going back to Mrs. Gillespie’s for some.” Girard produced a box from his pocket, and they made a light, and began to search together.

There had been so many passers through the lane that day, back and forth, that it was impossible for them to form any theories from the numerous tracks in the soft earth. They went over the ground slowly, examining, as far as possible, the copse on each side; but the green boughs hung out long and perfect, and showed no sign whatever of breakage or of violent displacement till they reached the bayou bridge. Here the thorn hedge had been torn in several places, but whether by a frightened horse or by workers of evil, they could not tell. Where the road ran across the bridge, the earth had seemingly been ploughed by the feet of a struggling horse. As Frank had said, the tracks were wild and irregular, and they might, indeed, have been the signs of a struggle; still, the road was so cut up at this point by the tracks of horses and of wheels, that the signs which they found might really mean nothing outside the usual routine of country traffic. It was a spot where a heavily laden wagon might be easily stalled, and the hoof-prints might be only those of an animal striving to free his bemired load.

The two men spoke little, but neither failed to take in the surroundings. Girard took the lantern, and, going to the low railing that flanked the bridge on the south side, held it at arm's length over the dark and sluggish water. His memory revealed, better than did the uncertain light, the condition of the stream below. It was a 'stream' more by courtesy than by a legitimate claim to the name, for the almost stagnant

water seemed rather to lie on the dark, flat lands, than to flow across them. Giant water-hyacinths were closing in on the stream from each margin and choking it slowly, but surely, with their luxuriant growth. Down the center of its bed, however, the water still glided—dark, suggestive, menacing. Frank came to Girard's side and looked down at the bayou.

"I have thought of that," he said, with a strange quiet.

"You see," said Girard, "old John may have become frightened and thrown him over the railing."

"Come to the other side," said Frank, "the hyacinths are beaten down there." He led the way off the bridge and down the side of it to the water's edge, and Girard saw on close examination that the undergrowth was bent and trampled. The long grass was too thick here to allow tracks to be made in the earth, and the disarranged growth was all that there was of suggestive circumstance.

"There is nothing here," said Girard, as they came up to the road again, "to prove that anything unusual has happened. That may be a common watering-place for cattle, or a haunt for idle negroes. I have often seen boys poking around down there for crawfish. The trampling of the grass and rushes doesn't signify anything; still," he continued, and he tried to speak as if he thought it unnecessary, "I think we'd better have the stream dragged when there is light enough."

"I have sent to town for men and a drag."

"You have done a good deal in the short start you

had of me," answered the other, holding the lantern up and looking closely at the young fellow for the first time. "Why, man, you are wringing wet! Where have you been?"

"In there," said Frank, nodding toward the black water. "I waded around all about here—you see——" he broke off, "that stream is too sluggish to have carried off anything heavy."

"Who took your message back to the city?" the lawyer asked.

"I didn't know the men. A couple of fellows came out this way in a buggy shortly after I got here, and were no end of help. I got them to go back for the sheriff and more men."

"Then you think there has been foul play?"

"I am sure of it."

"I don't know," said Girard. "Your father was walking when he came in here. Maybe John got frightened at something and ran off and left him. In that event, Mr. Lawrence would have struck across country yonder to the nearest car line."

Frank had listened intently while his friend spoke, but answered in a discouraged tone:

"He would have walked to the plantation in that case, but he has not been there."

"He may not have felt well enough. It's a good tramp from here, and he has been very feeble lately."

"But the blood on the saddle——" Frank's voice broke.

"Why, look at that wire fence."

"John hasn't a scratch on him," answered the young fellow.

The two were silent for a second, and then went to work at the search again with feelings verging on desperation. For Girard's satisfaction, they inquired again at the three houses along that part of the road; but the information elicited was practically what Frank had already given Girard, and threw but little light on the growing mystery. They next hunted up the other searchers, only to find that they, too, had been faced at every turn by perplexity and failure.

"One of us must ride back and tell your sister, and see what's the matter with that blooming sheriff," said the lawyer, as he and Frank faced each other in bewilderment.

"You go, will you?" asked the younger man, "I can't make up my mind to leave here."

"Don't give up, man," said his friend, as he wheeled his horse toward town, "it may turn out all right, yet. I'll be back as soon as I possibly can."

When Girard reached the city again, he found on inquiry that two deputy sheriffs had left for the scene of the supposed crime by a short route, some little time before. Satisfied on this point, he betook himself at once to the lodging-place of a private detective. He found the hall boy still up, though it was past twelve o'clock, so he went at once to the sleeping apartment of the man he was seeking.

Mr. Treadwell, the detective, had just "turned in"

for the night, but Girard banged on his door like a man who would take no denial.

"Come out of this, man, I need you," said the lawyer. Treadwell unlocked the door and admitted him with a scowl of irritation. Girard knew his man, though, and in a few minutes had him interested. While Treadwell was hurriedly dressing, he told the story from beginning to end, not leaving out a single detail.

"Anybody got anything against the old man?" asked the detective. He was brushing his hair as if to get even with it for some past offense, but he was listening with all his faculties awake.

"Yes, the negroes, you know—I told you what Frank Lawrence said about not starting them on the hunt. This man, Dawson, told me some time ago—let's see—it was in October of last year—that he had unearthed a conspiracy among them against Mr. Lawrence's life. It seems that there were some pretty bad ones in the lot, and that the old man had had to deal with them severely. He is a curious compound—Mr. Lawrence is—he would be just like a woman in disposition if he were not so much of a man. He has a way of being easy-going with people to a great length, and then coming down on them hard, when they go beyond the limit. You know what that policy means with negroes."

"Yes, you've got to come down on them from the very jump," put in Treadwell, and the other continued:

"Dawson said that the disaffection was pretty wide-

spread, but that Mr. Lawrence had insisted on punishing the ringleaders only. He would not have them arrested, you know, just gave them blue blazes and drove them off the place. He was good to the gang—too good—but he never did realize that they were free, and the more self-assertive ones hated him like sin.”

“Mafia got anything against him?”

“Against Mr. Lawrence? Why no, of course not.”

“Eh?” said Treadwell.

“Of course not, I say. Don’t you know he threw himself in the way, and tried to stop me when we were fixing to hang those fellows last March? I’d sooner expect them to send him a reward of merit, than to do him any devilment.”

“They haven’t got you, yet,” laughed the detective.

“No, that warning we posted the streets with last March seems to have done its work pretty effectually.”

“Not surprised,” put in the other, “I don’t hanker after being massacred, myself.” Treadwell seemed bent on being cheerful. The two went downstairs and into the street together, and Girard asked:

“Which way, now?”

“Thought I’d like to go to this plantation you were talking about, and look around a little. Later I’ll go up to the house and see what I can find out.”

“All right, I’m off in another direction,” said Girard. “But—look here, when you go to Mr. Lawrence’s house to-morrow, ask to see young Lawrence

himself. If he isn't there, you'd better communicate with the young lady—Miss Helen Lawrence, she is. She has more sense than all the rest of them put together, and can, no doubt, help you. And, say, Treadwell, don't scare her any more than you can help, now, will you?" The detective nodded gravely, but he chuckled to himself for some moments after he and the lawyer parted.

On leaving the detective, Girard went at once to Mr. Lawrence's, though he would have given much to be relieved of the duty of carrying distressing news to Helen. He had been utterly unstrung by her first breakdown, and he feared that the tidings he now carried would be more than she could bear. All the way out, he was wondering how little of the truth he could manage to tell her. When he reached his destination, the house was still brightly lighted and there were signs of life all about the place. For an instant, the hope rose in his mind that the old gentleman had returned, and had cleared up the whole matter. But that hope was quickly dispelled, for Helen herself ran down the front walk to answer his ring at the gate, and called before she reached him:

"Did you find him?"

"No, dear." He was slow to answer, and he took her hand and led her toward the house.

"What did you find?" she persisted, panting.

"He has not been at the plantation," he said, guardedly, "he must have gone somewhere else, we'll probably not hear till morning." They had reached

the veranda by this time, and Helen turned and faced him. She was standing where the hall light fell full on her face, and her eyes were bright and determined.

"Herbert, I am not a child. Why don't you tell me the truth?"

"Why, darling, I have not told you anything else!"

"Yes, but you don't tell me all. Talk to me as you would to Frank. I'm myself now—I'm not going to cry any more."

Girard had grown up with the idea that it is not always best to explain things to women and children; and, true to his nature, had acted on his convictions. During the years of their engagement, he had never dreamed of discussing his affairs with Helen, and had treated her like a child indeed.

Now, something in her brave blue eyes told him that she could bear the truth, and was determined to have it. He was surprised at this new phase in her, but was more surprised, in thinking it over afterward, that he was not displeased, also. He looked at her for a moment in hesitation, then told her all the circumstances of the search, and of his visit to the detective, leaving out only one point—Treadwell's mention of the Mafia.

Helen's eyes did not leave his own as he spoke, and though there was agony in their depths, there was something else, deeper still, which the man before her could not account for.

"You'll go back?" she said quietly.

"Yes, dearest, I'll go right away," and he crushed the hand he held between his own.

"Please do—don't stop any longer—good-by."

He stopped once again, though, for a moment at the gate, to look back at her. She was standing where he left her, white and calm, with the gaslight streaming over her.

"Where did a woman get a courage like that?" he asked himself.

As Girard fastened the gate, he felt a light, almost imperceptible touch on his arm, and he wheeled instantly to see who wanted him.

Before him, and shrinking into the protecting shadow of an oleander bush that spread its branches over the iron fence, was the figure of a small man.

"Come out into the light, if you want to treat with me," the lawyer commanded.

"State *quieta*," replied the figure, in suppressed tones. "Mafioso see me speak with you, I die. Attend! You be out in the night-time much, and in danger. Mafioso say to you—'Chi arrivé?' answer 'Un animo' and pass on. Attend! Perpetua she wear the tray of images about the neck. Perpetua walk with the *limpa*. She hate you. Keep the watch for her."

At the very first sound of the soft Italian voice Girard had taken out his knife. He now stood with it open in his hand.

"In God's name," he asked, "why do you warn me against one of your own people?"

"You save me once. I save you." As he replied, the Italian shifted his position slightly, which brought his face into the half-light. A deep scar seamed one cheek.

"Francisco!" exclaimed Girard, and in the flash-light of remembrance he was again looking into a rifle-barrel and affirming the innocence of a cowering, shrinking thing behind him.

The shadowy figure darted under the shrubbery and disappeared down a side street before the echo of the name ceased.

Girard paused for a moment in lively thought, repeating "*un animo*" to himself several times; then he pulled himself together and started on his way.

"A generous knave, that," he said to himself. "But after all, he brings me no news. Of course they all hate me. I knew they would. A woman—bah!"

CHAPTER TEN

THE SECRET OF THE BAYOU

IN a few hours more the place about the bridge was alive with men and horses and bloodhounds. The moon had gone down, and the scene was rendered more eerie by lanterns and torches that seemed only to accentuate the surrounding darkness.

The hounds were given the scent, and when they were unleashed near the store, they shot like a couple of arrows down the lane, baying deeply as they approached the bayou. When they reached the bridge they began circling about and rushing back and forth for a few paces, but would not leave the immediate vicinity.

"He didn't touch the ground beyond this spot," said one of the deputies, and the men looked at the quiet stream and at each other. Nevertheless, they explored every foot of the surrounding fields. Then, as soon as the gray dawn came, they dragged the sluggish stream for miles, but all to no avail.

"Batteaus ever come up this high?" the sheriff asked the next morning, as he and Mr. Dawson rode back to the place of the supposed tragedy after having seen the fruitless dragging of the bayou.

"No, not since them blamed hyacinths took it," an-

swered the farmer. "I don't believe a tea-cup could be rowed on that there bayou for two miles down." Nevertheless, the sheriff rode down the bank again, and here and there plunged through thin places in the copse to examine the growth with which the bayou was nearly choked. The giant hyacinths were green and perfect wherever he scanned the stream; clearly no boat had been rowed up that far.

"How does the idea of suicide strike you?" the sheriff asked, riding slowly back to where Mr. Dawson sat on his almost exhausted horse.

"Couldn't have done it, unless he had blown himself up with spontaneous combustion," answered Dawson. "Besides, he hadn't a trouble in the world, and had plenty of money." Dawson spoke as one having authority, for he knew a great deal about the business affairs of Mr. Lawrence.

"Well, which one of them bloomin' niggers of his do you think we'd better arrest on suspicion?"

"None of 'em," answered Dawson. "When young Lawrence first come to me last night, I advised him not to let on to the niggers. I hadn't had time to look into the matter, and I was, for the time being, half afraid that they had been up to something. But my brother Tom—he works for me, you know—has since told me that there wasn't a man of 'em absent from his work yesterday. I thought some time ago that there was a good many of 'em in the plot I told you they got up against him last fall; but I've changed my mind since then. I believe the ones he spotted

were the only real dangerous ones in the lot, and he got rid of them in short order."

"Well, it seems to me that they are the ones we need in our business. What are their names? Got any idea where they can be found?"

"One of them, 'Rufe Martin' he called himself when he was with us, left New Orleans weeks ago on a merchantman bound for Jamaica. I know it, for Mr. Simpson was on board the ship just before she weighed anchor, and said Rufe was there in the coal-hole working like a Christian."

"And the other?"

"Oh, 'Eli Sanders' he said his name was. The niggers around here called him 'Mr. Jones,' but Tom Rockett told me that, in Vicksburg, he went by the name of Sandy Wilson. He's a big muscular yellow man and walks bow-legged; and he's as mean and daring as the devil. But I don't think you will find him; I haven't heard of his being anywhere hereabouts since Mr. Lawrence discharged him last fall."

Frank and Girard and the detective, Treadwell, here rode up to the group. They had procured fresh horses at the plantation, but all three men were worn out, and Frank was as white as the handkerchief with which he mopped his face.

Mr. Dawson then repeated to them the substance of the conversation between himself and the sheriff in reference to the negroes. When he had finished, Treadwell advised strongly against making arrests

then, and Frank insisted that his advice be taken, but Girard said nothing.

One by one the tired searchers dropped away and returned to the city to rest.

"Let them go," advised the detective, "there's nothing else they can do, and the sooner we seem to give up the hunt, the quicker we'll get to the bottom of this." A little while afterward Treadwell, himself, disappeared from the scene; but Frank could not be induced to go home till it was again too dark to see, so Girard remained with him. At last, too worn out to think or act further, they, too, turned their horses' heads toward the city.

On the following day, the morning papers contained the offer of a large reward to anyone giving definite information about Mr. Lawrence, or throwing any light whatever on the mystery which surrounded his disappearance. It was signed, "Frank Lawrence."

For the next few weeks the search was prosecuted to the utmost by the parish authorities, and for a while the whole State was worked up over the case of the missing man, but the shadow of mystery lifted not a single time. The first solution that offered itself—that of Mr. Lawrence's having been made away with by some of the negroes from his plantation—was soon rejected. The man, Eli Sanders, proved an alibi without any trouble, for he was back in his old haunts in Vicksburg when the crime—if crime there was—was committed, and easily established the fact that he had

not been in New Orleans for seven months. The hands then engaged on Mr. Lawrence's plantation were all at work at the time of the old man's disappearance, and, besides, there was really no good reason to suspect any of them.

Those who followed the case but carelessly, and knew little of the life of the man who had so strangely disappeared, settled it at once, in their own minds, that he was another victim of the Mafia; but those who knew him best and recalled his earnest opposition to the Mafia lynching only three months previous could not credit this view of the case. The theory of suicide was advanced several times, and Girard grew very much inclined to adopt it.

"I would be nearly sure of it," he said to Frank one day, "but for one reason."

"What reason?" asked the other quickly.

"Why, there was no cause for it, you know." Frank turned white, and the lawyer began to feel bewildered, but he continued, "He was in fine health for a man of his age; his finances are all right, I happen to know, as his lawyer; and he had no great trouble on his mind"—the expression on Frank's face stopped him for a minute—then he asked the direct question, "Had he?"

"Yes," said the young fellow, with a struggle.

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The detective, Treadwell, kept on the even tenor of his way. He watched the sheriff's search like a man totally disinterested; he haunted the Lawrence home,

and pried curiously into everything; but he seemed utterly unable to formulate a theory. If he had found out anything, or was on the trail of a solution of the mystery, he kept his own counsel, and presented a stolidly unknowing front to all questioners. He from the first opposed keeping up to any length the excited and open search; but Frank could not be controlled in his agonized anxiety. When, however, the baffled authorities gave up in despair, Treadwell expressed himself as being glad to be rid of them. And Frank fell back for comfort upon the fact that, though his own attempts all proved futile, there was at work, throughout the State, as fine a detective force as the country could produce. Girard assured him that Treadwell knew how to manage the case, if any man did; and that as certainly as local excitement was quieting down, and the authorities were going their usual way again,—just so surely were these detective lynxes working more hopefully, more untiringly with the opportunities which the lull afforded them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LETHE

DURING all this time of watching and waiting, of hoping and despairing, Zoe lay between life and death, babbling like a child in the delirium of brain fever.

Helen was in despair. Though she had been fortunate in getting one of the best nurses in the city, she could not be induced to leave Zoe entirely to the care of another; so, day after day, she watched beside the sick girl, blessed in having this second sorrow to distract her from thoughts of that greater grief which seemed to threaten her very reason.

Frank persistently followed his own wild course of investigation. He could not be persuaded to give the search over entirely to the men employed to prosecute it, so he grew haggard and morbid with repeated disappointments. The time he spent at home was given to exhausted sleep, or to silent watching by Zoe's bedside.

The hours her brother spent by Zoe were times of deepest penitence for Helen. Knowing, as she did, only half the truth, she held herself responsible for much that was really not to be laid at her door. Frank's drawn face was a constant heartache to her, and whenever she glanced up and caught his eyes fixed

on her, she translated the look into one of deep reproach.

One day, when the nurse had left for a few hours' rest, and Frank and his sister were sitting beside Zoe, Helen leaned over and slipped her hand into her brother's.

"Frank," she said steadily, "I've wanted for a long time to tell you that I am sorry for having interfered. I was self-righteous, and thought I had a right to judge her. She is better than I am, no matter what her faults are, for she doesn't pretend to be good when she isn't, and she isn't hard and unloving. And—and—when father comes back"—her voice faltered, and her brother's clasp tightened on her hand—"I intend to tell him so. Maybe he will——" Frank looked at her bravely as he replied:

"Never mind, dear. It had to end as it did. Even if you had not said anything, it would have been the same."

"But need it end here?" she asked, with troubled eyes.

"Yes. There is something you don't know, which makes it inevitable." He had risen while he was speaking, and as he finished he stooped and kissed her on the forehead, and left the room. Helen sat bewildered with a feeling of relief, but not of satisfaction, in her troubled heart.

As the days slipped by, and Zoe's fever abated, the doctor directed that Frank remain out of the patient's sight, and that his name and the father's be not men-

tioned to her. Then, one long-looked-for day, Zoe's dark eyes opened to a recognition of everyone about her. She spoke little, however, and seemed to recall nothing but the persons and things in her immediate presence. To Helen's surprise and distress, Zoe never mentioned Frank or her father during the weeks of her convalescence, though day by day she began to pick up other dropped stitches of memory. Helen went to Doctor Nesbitt with her new distress.

"It sometimes leaves them a little unbalanced——" began the physician, but Helen's white face stopped him. They were standing in the hall just outside Zoe's room, and the girl had caught at the banisters to steady herself.

"Oh, doctor, not that—not *that!*"

"Why, my child," he said reassuringly, "it is better for her that it is so a while. Think of how much she is spared! And it isn't necessarily a permanent aberration. As the health of her body is restored, health of mind will, in all probability, return also. But it may be months, or it may be a year or two, Miss Helen, before this is accomplished. I tell you, because someone must know how to deal with her. Don't cry, my dear young lady, don't cry. My right hand must not fail me now."

The days passed by, each bringing a little more strength to the invalid, and Helen watched the velvety eyes, pathetically eager to see the awakening of sorrow in them. To her, anything was better than a mental shadow. Ere long Zoe was up and able to

move about the room, but still Helen was unanswered. At length the physician consented to the sick girl's being carried to the sitting-room for a change. He had not as yet allowed her to see Frank, as he was still afraid of exciting her; but Zoe, in her impatience, left her room before they were ready for her to go, and met Frank, face to face, in the hall.

Following his natural impulse, he kissed her with brotherly tenderness and asked how she felt. When Helen came out, he was standing in front of Zoe, and her hands were on his shoulders, in the old confiding way. She was telling him how very strong she was getting, and boasting of walking that far by herself.

"Want me to give you a lift, honey?" he asked; and he put his arm about her and helped her to the sitting-room sofa—Helen following after, struggling to keep back the tears of joy.

After that, Frank spent much of the time he should have given to rest, by the side of the invalid. To him, as to Helen, Zoe's illness had come as a blessing in disguise, when nothing else would have served to turn his mind, even momentarily, from the agony of suspense about his father.

Helen told Frank what the doctor had said in regard to Zoe's mental condition, and together they made their aunt understand that their father must not be mentioned to her, giving no reason except that it was Doctor Nesbitt's order.

At length Zoe was strong enough to walk from one room to another; and one day she surprised them

by following them into the dining-room, instead of waiting for her dinner to be brought to her, as usual. It was the first time she had appeared at table since their great trouble, and all eyes were turned to her. She went, without hesitating, to the place at the father's right hand where she had always sat, and peremptorily ordered Tom to bring a plate. When the slight confusion was over, and Zoe had been comfortably seated, Helen glanced at Frank, and was startled by the look on his face. He was standing motionless on the side opposite to Zoe—the place he had always occupied, even since his father had so strangely dropped out of the family group. There had been no plate laid for him.

Helen understood in a flash, and her heart ached for her brother more than for herself. Till that time, the father's plate at the foot of the table had been laid for his coming, and his seat left vacant for him. To-day Tom had evidently adjusted matters to suit himself, and by this new arrangement had assigned to Frank his father's place.

"You are neglectful to-day; don't let that happen again," Frank said in a low tone to Tom, as the latter hurried to arrange things in the usual way.

Brother and sister looked at each other, and then at Zoe, but Zoe only frowned at Frank impatiently, and exclaimed:

"Do make haste! I'm as hungry as a bear. Auntie, I'm going to eat some of everything to-day, and you needn't say a word."

That day was Tom's first and last attempt to leave his old master out of the family count.

Though Zoe grew better physically, she continued to go among the scenes that had known the father best without seeming to remember, in the slightest degree, the tragedy of which they spoke so eloquently. His chair in the sitting-room was kept vacant for him, the place at the foot of the table was laid for his coming, but the weeks glided into months and still the sound of his footstep did not come to wake the memory of the child that needed him most.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ON THE STILL-HUNT

ONE afternoon Girard was sitting in his office, enjoying a quiet smoke before locking up for the night.

As the smoke of his cigar curled upward and surrounded his head like a veil of enchantment, the struggles of the day slipped from him, leaving him alone with a dream presence. Was *this* Helen—this brave young woman who showed him every day an unsuspected strength? He had thought her a dependent, clinging child. His hand closed tightly on the arm of his chair. The child, Helen—that had been—had been a sweet solace to him when other things were laid aside; the woman Helen—that was now—was with him always—in the struggle, to help; in the resting time, to reward.

A light tap on the door brought the lawyer back to his office with a disagreeable suddenness.

"Come in," he shouted. In answer, the door opened, and Mr. Treadwell entered.

"Glad to see you, sir," Girard exclaimed very genuinely—for he had been growing restive of late under the detective's grim silence—"anything doing?"

"Well, yes, cotton's on the jump again this evening. Your deal yesterday was pretty timely, but you risk a good deal. What are you laughing at?"

"I am pleased that you are good enough to tell me about my own business, and I am just a little puzzled as to how you got at it. You do the Sherlock Holmes act uncommonly well when it comes to speculations in cotton; now, let's hear how you are working it in the case in hand." He gave his visitor a cigar, and in a few minutes they were going over again the unaccountable circumstances of the Lawrence mystery. Treadwell, as usual, had found out nothing, had done nothing; and Girard, as usual, hoped and believed him to be lying. They had many a time gone over this same ground together, and had always arrived at just this state of understanding. It was plain to Girard that Treadwell could not be induced to commit himself as to his course in the case. The lawyer was in no frame of mind this afternoon to worry with the man, so, after doing all he could to find out something of Treadwell's thoughts, he gave up trying, lighted another cigar, and resigned himself to being bored by the detective's steady, monotonous grind of talk.

It pleased Treadwell to-day to discuss, at length, the Lawrences, and he touched them all up, from Miss Susan, through the list, in his characteristic phraseology.

"When a man gets away like that," he droned, "in nine cases out of ten you can find the reason right in the nest he left. That's where your theory of suicide loses out—plenty of money, pleasant family, fine standing. Looks like the man had a whole lot to live for,

in spite of the old lady there. Say!—maybe she took a notion to marry him, and he just had to disappear in mid-air—far be it from me to criticise him.” The lawyer’s face did not change expression, and Treadwell continued:

“Fine couple of children, though. Never saw anything like that young woman’s grit.” Girard’s fingers tightened on the ink-well he was idly handling. He would have liked to throw it at the other man’s head, but he did not, and the detective went on, “The man that gets *her* will have to go for her, and go all the way. But that boy—that ‘Frank’—he’s a puzzler. He ought to be ‘His Grace the Duke of Something,’ and wear a sword and knee-breeches. He is too aristocratic by half for this day and time; and he’s got the most fiery spirit, and the most ladylike manners, I ever scared up on a trail. He’s out of plumb, kinder, and if this tension keeps up, something is going to break inside of the fellow.”

Girard turned in his chair and looked at him, but Treadwell did not seem to note his awakened interest, and kept on in the same idle way:

“And that little black-eyed beauty—my, but she’s a corker! They tell me she is an ‘adopted’ child. Where do you reckon she came from?”

Girard started to answer, then took his cigar out of his mouth, and looked steadily at the other.

“Mr. Treadwell, if you came here for the especial purpose of finding out about her, why don’t you come

out in the open and say so?" he asked at length. Treadwell chuckled.

"You're more trouble to me than all my money," he said in a flattering tone. "Say," he continued, leaning forward and tapping the other confidentially on the arm, "you couldn't find out all about her for me and keep your mouth shut, now, could you?"

Girard's brows knit suddenly in a deep frown, and his cigar went out between his fingers while he pondered an answer.

"That would depend," he said guardedly.

"Oh, well, think about it," said the other; "I'm in no hurry, you know." They both stood up at the sound of a footstep on the stair. A moment after, as Girard invited in a belated client, the detective slipped quietly out by another door.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE DREAM OF AN IDEALIST

GIRARD had been Mr. Lawrence's lawyer for a number of years—from the time when, as a very young man, he had first demonstrated that he was "business to his finger-tips." He had, in those past years, drawn up the old man's will for him, and Mr. Lawrence had then displayed his unbounded faith in the lawyer by making him his sole and unbonded executor. Indeed, Mr. Lawrence had advised with him on many points that were not strictly legal issues, and had gradually made the young man his confidential agent in all his financial affairs.

It was in keeping with Mr. Lawrence's disposition, and utterly inexplicable to the lawyer, that the old gentleman, after dismissing him as his daughter's suitor, should still make no move toward severing his business relations with him. Thus it happened that when Mr. Lawrence so strangely disappeared Girard was the only person in possession of a knowledge of his affairs.

In his capacity of agent, Girard administered Mr. Lawrence's business affairs without hesitation. Indeed, matters had been practically in his hands for so many years, and so well did he have them systematized, that they seemed now almost to move along of

themselves. At length, however, it occurred to him it would be a good thing for Frank Lawrence to have some responsibilities; so he went to the young man, prepared to turn over to him a number of troublesome details.

He had hoped to find in the son some of the father's business acumen and unusual decision of character. His hopes were doomed to disappointment. Frank was very unlike his father in this one particular, and his university training had but ill-prepared him for the disagreeable perplexities which Girard now submitted to him. Then, too, the lawyer had not taken into consideration what this discussion of Mr. Lawrence's affairs would mean to his son.

"My God, Girard, you talk as if father were dead!" exclaimed the young fellow.

"But these things must be attended to," insisted the other. "You can't let things go to pieces in his absence. Now, if you will look into the matter of improving these roads——" He stopped, for the young man, haggard and worried-looking, had put up his hand in protest.

"I'll be all right after a little," he said. "Don't ask me to step into his place now. Take hold for me a while, won't you?"

"Of course," said his friend, with a look of quick concern.

There were some papers of Mr. Lawrence's which Girard wanted to get into his hands. Some few weeks previous to his disappearance, Mr. Lawrence

had made a sale of a piece of property, but had delayed turning over to the buyers the patent and intermediate conveyances to it. These papers Girard knew to be in Mr. Lawrence's desk in his private study, and he had called this afternoon partly for the purpose of securing them for the purchasers of the property, who had demanded them.

Frank's sensitive shrinking at the first mention of his father's business matters, however, deterred the lawyer from introducing the subject again; and he at length decided to go to Helen for the papers he needed.

So excusing himself to Frank, he went in search of her to the sitting-room—the place where she was oftenest to be found. His light tap was answered by Helen's voice, and when he entered, she was alone.

He found her much easier to talk with than Frank. She took a quiet, sensible interest in the things he told her, though he could see that the discussion pained her.

Relieved at being able to meet some of the family on an everyday footing, and hoping that thoughts of business would be a diversion to her, he told her a great deal about his management of her father's affairs, and then asked her to help him look in Mr. Lawrence's desk for the papers he needed.

In an instant, the same pitiable expression that her brother had worn, spread over her face.

"I can't," she faltered, "but I'll get you the keys." It was no trouble to find them. They always hung in

the same place, and no one had touched them since the father's hand had last placed them there.

Helen showed them to Girard, but she made no move to take them down, and left the room, closing the door behind her.

He took the keys and sat down at the task, which was, even to him, very saddening. For fully an hour he sat, going over the papers one by one, and carefully replacing each where it had at first lain. He found what he wanted in the very last pigeon-hole.

After his work was done, he sat for some time before the open desk in deep thought. At length, however, he roused himself, and, locking the desk carefully, replaced the keys on the hook from which he had taken them. Then he went back into the sitting-room, where he hoped to find Helen again.

She was sitting in a willow rocker near the window, busily engaged in marking some table linen. Helen had found that constant occupation was the only thing which would make these days of suspense less long than eternity; and she took up, with feverish eagerness, any work her hands found.

It had come to be natural to Girard to see Helen engaged about the household duties for which he believed women especially created; and his necessarily frequent visits at the house since her father's disappearance had shown him how surely she was solving her domestic problems—how, day by day, she was coming to be his ideal helpmeet.

• He had seen so much of her during these visits,

and so little, too. The distressing circumstances which had been the occasion of bringing them together again, had been also, in a sense, a means of separating them. Ever since her deep trouble, Girard had felt that it would be cruel to force thoughts of himself upon her, so he had not again approached the subject of marriage.

Then, too, there was no opportunity of talking at length with Helen, unless he should make a formal request to see her alone. He had long felt that if he could drift into an interview with her and approach the subject guardedly, he might talk to her without seeming to be unsympathetically selfish. But, whenever he went to her home, Frank haunted him for what shreds of comfort he could give, or Miss Susan monopolized him, under the mistaken idea that she was making matters less awkward for both him and Helen.

Now, Girard felt that his opportunity had come, and he determined to make Helen see how almost imperative it was that their marriage should be delayed no longer.

He appeared not to see the chair across the rug to which her glance directed him, but unceremoniously dispossessed her work-basket and took the one beside her. They had, years ago, reached that stage of mutual understanding that allows people to be silent when together, so little was said for some time. It was enough for the man before her to watch her deft, white fingers as they plied the needle

in and out, and to reflect how wise was nature in forming them so daintily for such dainty work; but if Girard had suddenly been asked how much he thought mother nature cared for embroidery, it might have puzzled him to answer.

"Helen," he said at length, "I've delayed for some time saying what has been uppermost in my mind, because I felt that it would look selfish in me to intrude thoughts of myself on your grief"—Helen laid her work down in her lap and looked up quickly, with parted lips, but he would not allow her to interrupt him—"I have thought the whole matter over, and it is my honest and, I hope, unselfish opinion that it is best for you, and best for the others, too, that we be married quietly as soon as possible."

"Herbert——"

"Don't stop me, darling," he said, taking firm possession of both her hands. "I know how you feel about it—that it is almost a sacrilege to think of ourselves now—and, believe me, little girl, though there is nothing in earth or heaven that I want as I do you, it is not that which makes me speak now. It is because it is imperative that there be someone to share the weight you are carrying. I must take care of you, Helen, and I can't do it as I should till you give me the right." He put his arm around her to draw her to him, but Helen rose quickly. She could not free the hands that he had again caught between his own, so she was very close to him. Never before had she looked so deep into his eyes, never be-

fore had she come so close to him in spirit. She was trembling when she spoke.

"Herbert, I'm so sorry. I must have been blind not to see, but I never meant to make you think I had changed my decision——"

"Helen!" His clasp suddenly tightened on her fingers till it was painful.

"I am all to blame!" she cried in anguish. "I acted so foolishly, but—but—I couldn't help it then—my heart was breaking—and I needed you so!" He rose to his feet, and suddenly pressed her hands against his breast.

"Can you help loving me and needing me now?" he demanded, compelling her to meet his gaze again.

"You are unfair to me," she faltered, dropping her head, but not soon enough to hide from his searching eyes the quick rush of tears that filled her own. He instantly let go her hands, and in another moment she had mastered herself.

"Helen, you don't mean it. I know you don't. You simply can't look at the matter right, yet. I was a brute for opening the subject when your heart is so sore."

"But I don't want you to think that way," she insisted, facing him bravely now. "I would not deceive you again for anything in the world."

"I must and will think that way, dear heart, but don't let's talk about it now. You are not ready to listen to me yet."

"Herbert, you must—you must understand and be-

lieve me. I can't marry you, dear—I cannot, and I never shall.”

Girard looked into her eyes for a full minute. If she had ever doubted his love for her, she never did after that moment. He was amazed and wounded, but he had not lost faith in his power over her, and was not yet ready to give her up.

“Helen,” he said almost sternly, “you are deceiving yourself.” He paused a moment, then continued more gently, “You are stronger than I thought you were—strong for a woman—and I feel now that it is best for me to speak plainly to you. I know whose influence stands between us; and though I trust him as I would trust no other man, and respect him to reverence, I must tell you, dear, that I know him to have been much mistaken.” If Girard had not been looking at her he would scarcely have recognized the voice in which she answered him.

“He had laid hold on God. He could not have been mistaken,” she said.

“That, my darling,” he answered her, “is a subject on which we two have no common meeting ground. When you are older, you will learn, to your dismay, that men who have ‘laid hold on God’ with just his fervor, have come out from the struggle with diametrically opposite convictions on the same vital point.” It made his heart ache to see in her eyes the pain his words gave her, and he decided not to follow up his point too closely.

“There is something all wrong somewhere,” she

said, in hurt bewilderment; "there must be some one right way."

"The way that is set up as being the one way, Helen, cannot be wholly right."

"Oh, Herbert, is it not enough to have lost my father—don't——"

"Don't what, my darling?"

"Don't take away my God."

"I would not do that, Helen, if I could."

"Then don't talk to me in that way."

He looked at her some moments almost pityingly, and then said very gently:

"We will not discuss that side of it, then. But, Helen, why can't we agree to disagree on these matters and still take up life together? Surely, dearest, there is enough common ground between us to enable us to be happy together."

"Father thought that way would be sin."

"Did your father believe that a man and a woman should think and feel the same about all matters before it was right for them to marry?"

"He thought they ought to have the same ideas of life—the same conception of its purpose."

"That is the dream of an idealist," he answered quietly.

"And yet, when he was with me, when he talked to me and taught me, it seemed to me that his was the sane, the real, the true way of thinking, and all the rest was a dream."

"And now, Helen, now?"

"Now—now that he has gone from me—God knows to what mysterious fate!—I must be true to him—oh, Herbert, I must, I must!"

"Helen, dearest, listen to me——" But she laid her hand on his breast to stop him, and asked simply:

"Do you love me?"

"With all my soul, I do."

"Then believe me."

"I do not, I will not believe you, but I will wait. I can wait for what I know must come."

Half an hour later, Frank came in and found Helen on her knees before her father's empty chair, with her face buried in its cushions.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LETTER

GIRARD was not prone to conjure up imaginary evils, and lost very little sleep on account of forebodings; but Treadwell's suggestion to him in regard to Mr. Lawrence's adopted daughter brought up speculations distasteful in the extreme and hard to put away. Why the thought should so haunt and displease him he was not prepared to explain, not even to himself. He did know, however, that he shrank from any inquiry instinctively, and that the unpleasant idea would not down at his bidding. Treadwell had not repeated his request, nor in any way referred to it, though he and the lawyer had met twice since. Girard was shrewd enough to know, however, that the detective was only shamming indifference, and that, sooner or later, the subject would again come up between them.

His first impulse had been to decline to let Treadwell open the matter at all; but he had great faith in the sagacity of the detective, and he felt that it was almost imperative to follow up any trail that might promise a solution of the mystery which, day by day, was becoming more unendurable to the old man's family. There were other circumstances that com-

bined to perplex and discomfort Girard, for his nature was one of those that must reduce everything to a certainty.

He had been too intimate at the Lawrences's and too entirely wide-awake not to suspect the existence of the love affair between Frank and Zoe. He was too shrewd not to see now that something had happened between them.

Then, too, there was another circumstance which puzzled him not a little. On the morning of the day on which they had last seen Mr. Lawrence, the old gentleman had appeared at Girard's office almost as soon as he, himself, had reached it, and had there entered a codicil to his will, transferring the guardianship of Zoe from Girard to Frank, and commending the girl to his son's "peculiar care." Girard was not often touched by the circumstances that came under his professional notice, but the note of pathos in the old man's words had struck him as he wrote them down, and the impression remained with him. He remembered, too, how he had followed Mr. Lawrence to the steps and watched him descend till the sunlight rested on his gray head. That was the last time he had seen him.

Girard was on his way to the Lawrence home one afternoon in August, and was turning over the matter in his mind for the twentieth time, perhaps. His hand was on the gate when the remembrance of his life-long friend, as he stood on the sidewalk with the morning sunlight resting on him, came up before him.

"Would he have mē stop it? Wouldn't he?" he asked himself.

He went in, and was unceremoniously ushered into the family sitting-room, where Miss Susan, Helen, and Frank were gathered. Though it would have been impossible for him to remain away from Helen, Girard had come to shrink from going there, from the fact that each visit meant a new disappointment to the family. They were always watching, expecting, hoping. He never entered the house but there was an instant flutter of excitement in the hope that he had brought the news for which alone they seemed now to be existing. Then there was the disappointment, and the pained silence—and after that, the spasmodic attempts at conversation about everyday things. This visit was but a repetition of many preceding it. After the first eager questions and the usual answers, the conversation dropped into the commonplace.

"Hasn't anybody in the family persuaded anybody else to get out of this hot town yet?" asked Girard, reverting to a subject that had been under discussion among them for some weeks.

"No," said Miss Susan—she was always first to answer a general remark—"I can't persuade Frank it's his duty to take the girls away. I could stay here and keep house and attend to the business well enough. But, of course, these children know better than I do, Mr. Girard, they are so much *older*, and have had so much more experience."

"If auntie and Frank and Zoe——" began Helen.

“Good gracious!” broke in Frank. “The idea of such a thing. I am obliged to be here. If you three would ever be reasonable, you would know that you can’t stand what I can. You never spent a summer in New Orleans before in your lives.”

“It strikes me,” put in Girard mildly, “that the only ‘reasonable’ member of this family is the one that’s telling about it.” They all smiled gratefully. The self-contained, reticent lawyer had come to be, in these past few months, their surest relief from the painful tension of their feelings. He seemed to know, better than anyone else, how to divert their thoughts and their conversation, and his touches of quiet humor had a way of seeming not out of place or unsympathetic. There was a moment’s silence, and then Miss Susan startled them all by exclaiming in an excited voice:

“Well, if there isn’t Zoe coming in the gate with her hat on! Helen, I thought you said she was upstairs lying down?” If that good lady had thrown a bomb-shell in their midst she could not have caused more surprise, for Zoe was still far from being restored to health, and, on account of her mental state, had been under strict surveillance.

The three others hastened to the front window and peered out in incredulous surprise. Girard looked at Helen for an explanation, and Frank hurried out to meet the truant.

“She told me she wanted to be by herself this afternoon—she said we made her nervous hovering

over her," answered Helen in amazement. "I wonder where she slipped off to!"

Frank and Zoe came in, and for a few minutes all were a-flutter making the exhausted girl comfortable. Her face was the color of ivory, and when she dropped her head wearily against the chair cushions and closed her lids, her long lashes swept the dark circles under her eyes and gave an almost deathlike pallor to her cheek.

"Zoe, what do you mean? Where have you been?" demanded Miss Susan for the fourth time.

"I've been hunting for father." She covered her face with a pair of pitifully thin hands, and two or three tears trickled from beneath them. Helen sank back with a cry of pain, and Frank and the aunt gathered her in their arms, while the adopted child sat apart with her face in her hands.

Girard was standing with his back to the window, running his hands into his pockets and taking them out again, and there was an unwonted softness in his eyes as he looked uneasily from the solitary figure of the girl to the group on the sofa. At length he went over to Zoe and touched her on the arm.

"I wouldn't cry about it if I were you," he said lamely, and then, because he could not express what had come to his lips, he added, "We thought you didn't remember."

"*As if I could forget!*" He was never very sure that he heard aright—but that was what it sounded like.

Just then a servant, entering the room, attracted Girard's attention and handed him a letter.

"Frank, it is in your father's hand!" exclaimed the lawyer, letting his voice out in his excitement. They all sprang to their feet, and when Girard handed Frank the letter they closed around, afraid to hope, yet hoping everything from the unsealing. Frank gave one glance at the address, and with a deep, reverent "Thank God!" tore the envelope open.

It was a note of one page only, and when it was spread out, every eye caught the signature first—"Affectionately, your father."

"I am safe and well," read the son aloud, and he all unconscious or unashamed that he was sobbing out the words. "Do not give yourselves any more uneasiness about me, and don't look for me further. I have serious reasons for remaining where I am for a while. Will write again. Affectionately, your father."

If the old man's spirit had suddenly stood in their midst, and signaled "Hush!" with its shadowy finger, the group could not have taken on a more awesome quiet. No one spoke; no one moved; they looked at each other with the expression of those who stand in the presence of death; Helen turned a shade paler, and Frank was breathing deep and hard.

Then the letter was passed reverently from one to the other, each reading it several times in silence, and turning it over to see if anything were written on the other side.

The scene became too tense for the self-contained

man of the world, and Girard would have slipped away had not Zoe suddenly put out her hand and stopped him. She was the last to get possession of the letter, and she now stood beside the center-table with the open page before her.

"Herbert—Frank! This is not father's handwriting!"

Girard was nearest to her, and picked up the sheet promptly, running his eyes over it from top to bottom.

"Yes, it is," he exclaimed; "I would know that hand in a thousand." Frank and Helen were already looking on the page with him, and echoed his opinion strongly.

"Look at that little 'g,' Frank," cried his sister in an unsteady voice; "don't you remember how we used to laugh at it and call it a figure eight?"

Frank hurried to his father's study, and was soon back again with a specimen of Mr. Lawrence's writing to compare with that of the note they held. Their apprehensive eagerness changed to almost insupportable joy as letter by letter tallied; but when they had verified every character, Zoe said abruptly:

"I tell you, that's a forgery!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SUMMONS

FRANK and Girard hurried to the detective's office with the letter. Treadwell was, perhaps, the best handwriting expert in the State, and they agreed to accept his decision in the matter as final. They were careful to take with them several specimens of Mr. Lawrence's writing with which to compare the note. The detective was not found in his office, and though Girard and Frank waited a full hour for him, he still did not appear. It was growing late, so, on the suggestion of the lawyer, the two repaired to the St. Charles for supper. They had left a note at his office, asking for an interview with Treadwell at nine o'clock in his own apartments.

"It is very likely he hasn't got the note," said Girard, an hour later, as he examined his watch. "Still, he may have, or we may run upon him accidentally. Shall we go now? It's eight-thirty."

Frank, who had been feverishly eager during the meal, was only too glad to be moving, and in ten minutes they were at Treadwell's door. As luck would have it, the man they were looking for himself answered their knock.

Treadwell claimed not to have received the note,

but he greeted the two with as little surprise as if he were indeed there in answer to their request.

It seemed to Frank that their host took an unconscionable time in doing the civilities, and when he stopped to light his pipe, the young fellow's nervous fingers had an almost uncontrollable impulse to close on his thick throat.

His pipe well lighted, the detective pulled the table closer, and set about the work in hand with stolid deliberation.

Frank declined to be seated, and walked back and forth restlessly. Girard, however, sat down quietly by the table on which Treadwell had spread the different papers and watched the expert keenly, as his eyes and magnifying glass traveled slowly over the pages.

"Well, what do you make of it?" demanded Frank before a half dozen words had been scanned.

"Give him a chance, man," said Girard, glancing quickly up at the impatient fellow, then dropping his gaze again to the level of the detective's face. Treadwell continued the examination in silence.

If time were measured by heartbeats, we could understand why some heads grow white in an hour. In the brief time which passed before that magnifying glass reached the signature, Frank Lawrence grew old with the long agony of waiting. Despair is often less cruel than Hope. Frank had lately told himself, over and over again, that his father was dead; and he was just beginning to believe his own assurances

and to find a certain peace in them when this letter came to wake again an almost intolerable hope and expectancy.

At last Treadwell threw down the glass and pushed the papers from him.

"It's a forgery, gentlemen, but a damned clever one."

"That's what Zoe said!" Girard's exclamation was addressed to Frank, but the detective answered it.

"She did, did she? Well 'Zoe's' damned clever herself!"

Frank put his hand on the table with entirely unnecessary force.

"I think we may as well leave my sister out of our business discussions," he said. Girard's face turned red, but the detective was already speaking to the case in hand.

"That's a feeler," he explained, looking at the note; "there will be others soon, asking for money. I'll get you to leave this with me."

"Is it possible that a band of devils can be holding my father for ransom?" asked Frank, resting his unsteady hands on the table and looking at Treadwell searchingly.

"Why, no," said the detective—something in the young man's feverish eyes compelling him to speak more freely. "In all probability, the ones who forged this note had nothing at all to do with the devilment concerning your father. It's no doubt just some sharp

rascal that's seizing on the circumstance to extort money from you. You'll hear from him again, Mr. Lawrence, and I'd advise you to let me do the answering of him."

"And the Mafia?" asked the young man.

"Ask this dago-regulator over here," said Treadwell, with a grin at Girard. "But, seriously speaking, Mr. Lawrence, it hasn't been the practice of the Mafia to seize unoffending old men and fly off in the air with them. No more has it been a practice with them to hold for ransom. If your father had ever done anything to the dagos and had one fine day been fished out of the Mississippi, I'd know it was them. Besides, it ain't likely they'll give trouble this soon after that little song and dance they got last March."

"How on earth could my father's handwriting be so closely imitated?" Frank had asked the question before when Treadwell was busy with the examination and it had gone unanswered.

"Easy enough with a little practice, and the fellow who wrote this has probably got forging down to a fine art. All he had to do was to get hold of some of your father's writing to go by, and he could have done that in fifty different ways," the other answered.

Treadwell then asked a number of questions concerning the receipt of the letter, and after a few minutes more of conversation Girard and young Lawrence rose to go.

"Believe I'll go down town, too; wait a bit," said

Treadwell, carefully locking up the papers they had brought. He took his hat and followed them into the street.

"I think I shall go home," said Frank, when they reached the sidewalk. He was too miserable and too mystified to wish their companionship, so he left them with a short "good-night." The two other men took the opposite direction.

"Pretty touchy about his 'sister,' ain't he?" was Treadwell's first remark when Frank was out of ear-shot. There was a moment's silence, and then Girard said:

"On the whole, Lawrence is right about it. There is no need of bringing the young ladies into it." Girard deprecated the fact that Helen had been compelled to meet and be interviewed by the rough men engaged in the search for her father, and he understood Frank's scruples perfectly.

"I don't know about that," said the detective. "Say," he asked, with a mild show of interest, "have you climbed that little one's genealogical tree for me yet?"

"No low branches to lay hold of." Girard tried to speak indifferently.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that."

"But I am sure, so why bother about it?"

"Gettin' tired, eh?" said Treadwell. "Well, suppose I tell you she's the one to help us out." The lawyer was thoroughly interested, but on his guard.

"You would have to talk a long time before you

could make me believe it. Why, the girl was left on Mr. Lawrence's doorstep eighteen years ago! What possible connection could there be between that event and his disappearance three months back?"

"Why, eighteen, or rather nineteen, years is a short link between events." The two men stopped involuntarily on the corner, and looked at each other.

"Why *nineteen*?" demanded the lawyer.

"I always begin at the beginning," answered the other, "and doorstep babies, like curses and chickens, generally come home to roost."

"^r will have nothing to do with it," said Girard.

The letter purporting to be from Mr. Lawrence was the forerunner of some dozen others which came in quick succession. They poured in from various directions and bore all sorts of signatures. According to these, severally, Mr. Lawrence was in each city heard from, and each writer had valuable information concerning the missing man, which he would part with for the consideration of a few hundreds or thousands of dollars, as the case might be. In none of these, however, was there any attempt made to imitate Mr. Lawrence's writing.

The first letter was the only one the advisers of the family thought it worth while to notice, and Mr. Treadwell had treated even this as of no consequence; but the old man's children were unwilling to ignore any possible chance, and, against the urgent advice of both Girard and Treadwell, threw money broadcast

in answering the various overtures. 'All this was of no avail, however, as their compliance with the terms offered by the anonymous missives developed nothing in regard to their father, and only precipitated showers of other letters of the same character. Then followed still others, containing dire threats, and Helen was almost crazed.

When matters reached this stage, Girard could bear it no longer; and in a telling appeal, he persuaded Frank to turn over to him unopened all suspicious-looking letters. Frank, thereafter, made it his business to be the first to get the mail from the postman, whenever practicable, and to conceal all such communications from Helen and Zoe.

When Girard got the matter into his own hands he did what he had from the first desired to do—referred all anonymous communications to the detective, with authority to act at discretion. Mr. Treadwell gave it as his opinion that none of the later letters were from the same source as the first.

"But we'll hear from him again," he said; "just wait."

They had not long to wait, for in a few days a letter postmarked "New Orleans," and addressed only to the house number, was delivered to the maid at Mr. Lawrence's door.

The family were gathered in the dining-room, having lingered there after breakfast. Girard had come in early on pressing business and was one of the group when the letter was brought in. Frank looked

worried when Sallie came in with the mail in her hands. Breakfast was later than usual, and not realizing the passage of time, he had neglected to be on the veranda when the postman came.

Helen was nearest the door and held out her hand for the letters. She seized instantly upon the one with the queer address, and, dropping the other mail on the floor at her feet, tore the envelope open. Frank and Zoe were beside her in a moment, looking over her shoulder. The writing was not in imitation of their father's, but was bold and plain. The letter ran:

"To old Mr. Lawrence's Family:

"Your father is in our hands, alive and well, and we have about made up our minds to compromise with you. If you want to get the old man back, you can do so to-night by doing as we say. Let his daughter come by herself to the deck of the abandoned houseboat, 'Lafitte,' moored at lugger-landing at the foot of Marigny street, with \$2,000 cash, and her father will be released to her. If she is accompanied, followed, or watched, we won't appear on the scene at all, and the jig will be up with Lawrence. Don't attempt to trap us, as we have means of keeping up with everything you do, and you'll only miss your chance of saving your father. If you don't believe what we say, ask Dave Treadwell what he did with the photographs he got out of the old man's desk. This is your last chance, and positively it's no use to do anything except just what we say."

Girard had also read the letter over Helen's shoulder.

"Turn over to the other side," he said; and when Helen obeyed, all four started with exclamations.

There in Mr. Lawrence's hand, or a very clever imitation of it, was a short note which said:

"The foregoing is all too true. My daughter will be perfectly safe in obeying these directions. Let her come for God's sake. Father."

Zoe fell back against the wall with a breathless exclamation:

"I gave Mr. Treadwell those photographs!"

They looked at each other in blank astonishment.

"What photographs?" came in full chorus from them.

"Oh, I don't know," cried the bewildered girl; "a whole lot of old ones that father had in a box in his desk. Don't you know how he kept things? I suppose he had every picture that had ever been given him in that box. But"—she added with a frown—"Mr. Treadwell told me not to tell."

"Where is Treadwell?" Frank asked of Girard.

"In Chicago," the other answered, "and will not be back for four or five days."

"Frank," said Helen, pulling at her brother's sleeve, "this is the way he always signed himself. In all the letters he wrote home, he never put anything but the word 'Father' at the last."

"It's a much plainer forgery than the first, Helen," put in Girard quickly. "The added likeness to your father's signature is an accident—nothing more. I would pay no attention whatever to it."

Again they had recourse to the father's papers, and again they went over the agonizing comparison. This time Frank and Girard were both convinced that the letter was a forgery, and Miss Susan warmly seconded their judgment. They had just reached this conclusion, and agreed upon it, when, to the astonishment of all, Helen declared her intention of meeting the appointment.

A warm argument followed. Girard was in favor of ignoring the summons; Frank wanted to dress in women's clothes and go, on the bare possibility of there being truth in the letter; Miss Susan wanted anybody to go but one of "the children." Zoe came out boldly on the side of her quondam enemy, Girard, and his opinion of her went up a hundred points. The fact that a man as secretive as Treadwell could be spied upon, and the further fact of the very clever imitation of Mr. Lawrence's writing, were subjects of a prolonged discussion, all through which Helen held to her determination. Her brother and Girard were equally determined that she should run no such risk, and Frank declared authoritatively that she should not go. Elaborate plans were then formed for surrounding the place of the proposed meeting with a cordon of police, and letting Helen go, followed secretly by her brother and Girard, to decoy the forgers into the trap.

Helen, however, positively refused to accede to this plan, saying that if there were any truth in the letter such a course would destroy utterly all chance of aid-

ing her father. The writers of the letter, she pointed out, would be sure to keep up with their movements. Had they not already demonstrated that they were perfectly competent to do so? She would go, and go as the letter directed.

“No, you will not,” said her brother quickly. “If you do, I’ll go with you every step of the way, so what is to be gained?”

“You are not often unreasonable,” said the lawyer, a little sternly; then, in a lower voice, “Do you think I would let you?” But Zoe came to the point directly.

“Don’t be a goose, if you can help it, Helen,” she advised sharply; and Helen was forced, by the weight of circumstances, to take her advice.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SUMMONS ANSWERED

WHEN Girard left the Lawrence home that morning he went directly to his place of business and tried to throw himself into his work, for it had piled up against him dishearteningly. The day proved a very trying one for him. His partner was off to the Gulf on a fishing trip of several days; he himself was late in getting to the office on account of the protracted visit he had paid the Lawrences; and the sandy-haired girl who did his stenographic work came down with a sick headache. This last circumstance provoked the lawyer no little, for he felt that somehow she had taken a mean advantage of him in getting sick just at this stage of the work. She was subject to headaches, and it seemed to her employer that she always managed to have one at exactly the wrong time. Girard did not take time to reflect that there was no right time for anybody to fail him, for he always exacted his money's worth from his employes.

True, he offered to let the girl go home, but he was so uncompromisingly grim when he did so, that she declined promptly and hurried to work.

There were a number of letters to be written, but the girl was typing an important brief, so Girard

seated himself at his desk, and hurriedly wrote letter after letter himself, with scarcely any change of position. If he was hard on his employes, he was merciless toward himself.

This was one of the rare days in which thoughts of business did not entirely shut out everything else from his mind. As he finished the first letter and began to fold and direct it, his thoughts at once reverted to the scene he had witnessed that morning.

"What a foolish, boyish idea—that of Frank's. Disguise, and midnight meetings in this day and time! That fellow is singularly undeveloped," he thought.

Again the pen was traveling steadily across a page. It was a case he had lost in the lower court and he was advising an appeal. After a little came the signature, then thoughts of the suggested meeting again as he folded the letter.

"Why not go down there quietly as if on business, and do a little spying from the shadows of the warehouses?" he thought. "Of course there is nothing in it, but it could not hurt to try, and it would be interesting, to say the least. Now suppose—*Come in!*"

The nervous stenographer nearly jumped off her stool at the sudden sound of his voice answering a faint knock; then the door opened, and a girl with eyes like wood-violets stood on the threshold. She seemed to hesitate a moment in embarrassment. She was alone.

"Why—why—come in, Miss Lawrence." The

young man jerked on his coat, and hastened to shake hands with the visitor. The stenographer paused a moment and looked up, then dropped her eyes to the machine, and the monotonous hum of the keys began again.

Girard hastened to place Helen a chair in comfortable nearness to a window, then dragged up another for himself, and took a seat in front of her. He did not speak at once, but contented himself with taking in her cool daintiness with his searching glance. He was just thinking to himself, "How fresh she looks," when Helen said, softly:

"How tired she looks." His glance followed hers to the other end of the room. The stenographer had stopped for a moment, and was resting her head on her hand.

"Yes, she has a headache," he explained in a low tone. "I suggested her going home, but she wouldn't do it."

"Why don't you *make* her go?"

"Well, I haven't had that success in managing young women that would lead me to believe I could." The stenographer resumed her work.

Helen had come to see him about the alarming letter they had received that morning. As the buzz of the typing machine isolated their conversation, she again undertook to convince Girard that she was in duty bound to meet the proposed engagement, and assured him that if he would only give his own consent, Frank would let her go.

The stenographer got through a page of her brief while Helen was laying her case before the lawyer; and three pages more were finished, before he finally convinced her that he would never consent to her undertaking such an adventure.

When the conversation came to this unsatisfactory finish, the two arose, and Girard began to arrange things on his desk, preparatory to escorting Helen downstairs—all the while trying to think of the easiest and pleasantest way of telling her that she ought not to visit down-town offices unaccompanied. While he was thus engaged, she crossed the room to where the machine was humming. Girard would no more have thought of introducing his stenographer to her, than he would have thought of introducing any other piece of his office furniture; but Helen was a law unto herself these days, and she was already saying, sweetly:

“Do you like typewriting? I’ve always imagined it would be so fascinating.” The girl stopped to hear, and answered some little commonplace, while a smile lighted her tired eyes.

“I’m afraid Miss Lawrence wouldn’t find it ‘fascinating,’ if she had your and my experience with it, Miss Alice,” said Girard, genially, as he joined them. Then the two went out, Helen looking back to say a pleasant “good-morning.”

When Girard returned from seeing Helen on the car, he went straight to the stenographer and took up the brief on which she was still working.

"We'll let this do for to-day, Miss Alice," he said kindly, "I can get Houghton's clerk to finish it, and the other things can go undone. Say, you needn't come back to-morrow, unless you feel well. I can get along all right."

For hours after the grateful girl left, Girard worked on by himself. At length he looked at his watch. It was three o'clock, and he was famishing. As he gave the office-boy his orders, and seized his hat, a new idea occurred to him and he hurried to the telephone.

"Is that 797?" he called. "Well—hello! who are you? Well, say, Frank, *you* are the one I want. I have seen your sister again to-day, and I shouldn't be surprised if she makes trouble for us. You had better keep your eye on her, indeed you had. You will have to treat her just as you would an unreasoning child. Don't, *don't* let her go to that place to-night! Understand?—'Determined?' I should say so!—Is it any wonder that our forebears shut them up in four walls?"

That afternoon, for the first time in his history, the young lawyer neglected his work. The idea that had suggested itself to him in the morning—that of going near the appointed place, in the hope of seeing or hearing something that might bear on the growing mystery—claimed more and more of his thoughts. It made no difference how much he assured himself of the folly and futility of such an attempt; the thought of it had begun to germinate in his brain, and before

the day was over, it had taken possession of him as a full-grown determination.

Arrived at this conclusion, he realized that he would better change his style of dress in order that he might not be readily recognized, for he knew that he was a well-known figure on the streets of New Orleans.

His all-absorbing interest in the Lawrence mystery, and his innate love of adventure, put office work quite out of the question an hour before his usual closing time and sent him to a clothing shop. A broad-brimmed hat and a mackintosh with a long cape were quickly purchased and sent up to his apartments. Then the hours began to drag tantalizingly, and he was worn out with impatience by the time he stood on the front steps of his place of abode, cloaked and covered, ready to depart for the river-front. It was then well after twelve o'clock, and the streets were becoming quiet; still there were too many people abroad to warrant his appearing in the most frequented streets in his unusual costume. He reasoned that if there were any possible chance of the appointment's being kept by the makers of it, there would be spies abroad in the streets that night; and that he, as one closely connected with the search for Mr. Lawrence, would not be overlooked.

For these reasons he chose a roundabout route that tried his olfactory nerves and his temper sorely, and had measured a circuitous, two-mile tramp through back alleys and unfrequented streets before arriving in the neighborhood of his destination.

Girard had been sincere in his advice to the Lawrences to pay no attention to the forged letter. He was sincere, also, when he said to Frank, confidentially:

"Your sister is still determined. I wouldn't get a foot from her. I'd hold her, Frank, if she wouldn't stay otherwise." He recalled this now, with a feeling of security from interference, for he believed that Helen would persist in her determination, and thus keep Frank out of his path.

It was with a feeling of something like relief that he reached, at length, the shadow of the long sugar-houses that skirted the wharf. The sidewalks were sheltered here for blocks, and the uncertain and scattered lights of the street were of no avail against the shadows of the low, broad awnings.

There were hundreds of barrels of molasses stacked against the walls of the sugar-sheds, oozing their dark, sticky contents over the sidewalk. Down in the gutters, and in the low places of the broken pavement, were pools of the gummy, saccharine fluid, and the air was heavy and disgusting with noisome sweetness.

In time past, Girard had avoided this vicinity, whenever it was possible to do so, and when compelled to visit it, had given the dripping barrels a wide berth. Now he found himself pressing uncomfortably close to them in his efforts to avoid every straggling ray of light.

The night air was dank and unwholesome, and unpleasantly suggestive of fever.

Girard soon realized that he might as well have been at home, in bed, as far as seeing or hearing anything from his present point of vantage was concerned. The place assigned for the meeting was still a hundred or more yards away, and the night was dark.

He was too much alive to the interest of the adventure to give up now. The dare-devil spirit of his youth was upon him. He would go down to the boat. He readjusted the pistol in his pocket, and in another moment left the friendly shadows and came out into the soft light which the river caught from somewhere and reflected on the surrounding atmosphere.

Some fifty feet in front of him, down at the edge of the wharf, lay a dark something that looked like a blot on the steel-blue of the river. It was quiet, shadowy, suggestive. Beyond this—as far as the eye could reach in the uncertain light—spread the broad Mississippi, the majestic sweep of its waters shimmering softly, as with the light of the day just dead.

Unwilling to remain in the open, Girard hurried across the levee toward the dark blot on the waters. When he had come quite near to it, he found it to be what the letter had described, a small house-boat. It was unlighted and deserted-looking, but the gang-

plank was laid. It was entirely too dark to make out the name of the boat with any degree of certainty, and he guessed, rather than saw, the word "Lafitte" in shadowy suggestions of unreadable letters.

"Yes, this must be the one," he pondered, "for this is Marigny street, and there are no other craft in sight but the luggers."

Hesitating no longer, he crossed the gang-plank, and was on the deck in the deep shadows. He was glad to escape the open stretch he had just crossed, but he now suddenly realized that he was in a close place. For all he could see or hear, he had the rotten old craft to himself, but he knew that he must not stop. He took his pistol in his hand and advanced a step or two, when a movement in the shadow near the cabin door, caused him to pause again. His finger was on the trigger. The next moment a figure—a woman—glided up to him and whispered:

"And did they send *you*?"

As quick as a flash, he gripped her arm with his left hand. In spite of a hard struggle on her part, he held her thus while he replaced the weapon in his pocket and took out a match. The woman crouched down into the deeper shadows at his feet. She was very still. As Girard struck a light, she uttered a low cry and tried to turn her face away, but it was too late.

"Zoe! Oh, you mad, mad child!—It is I, Girard—don't be scared. What on earth made you come here?" She was panting like a frightened animal.

"You said you didn't believe," he exclaimed, unconsciously shaking her by the arm. "Have you seen anybody?"

"No, I thought you were the one."

"Hush!"—in a whisper—"We ought not to be talking. Come here and let's wait awhile." He would have drawn her into the denser shadow, but she cried out:

"I'm scared, I'm scared to death. Take me home! I won't go back there, I tell you. Take me home—take me home!" Her voice rang out on the night.

He saw that the abnormal courage which had brought her here, had suddenly given way to such violent nervousness that there would be no detaining her in safety. Much to the girl's consternation, Girard struck another match to look at his watch—it was twenty minutes past two.

"All right, we will go, it is after time," he said, reassuringly. He took the frightened girl by the arm, and hurried her out of the boat and across the wharf. When they had gained the darkness by the sugar-house, he stopped and spoke.

"Zoe," he said, "I want you to hide here and let me go back, I'll not sleep to-night, unless I make a search down there."

"I'll not! I shan't! I can't!" and she burst into hysterical weeping. "I tell you I looked—I went all through—I had a piece of candle with me—there's not a living soul there. You shall not leave me. I'm scared. I'm scared!" She was clinging round his

neck now, and he could not have left her, if he had tried.

"Well there, there, little girl. Of course I could not leave you. It's a wild-goose chase after all. God knows I'm glad I came, though—I wonder what you will do next!"

When her paroxysm of tears was over, Girard guided her out of the noisome neighborhood. They had reached the outskirts of respectability before he asked:

"What made you come? You said you didn't believe."

"I got to thinking about it, and I didn't want to miss a chance. The letter said 'his daughter.'" Her voice quivered.

Girard took her hand in his and held it very close as they walked along. It was such a soft, slender little hand—he could easily have crushed it in his own powerful fingers.

"I have never quite understood you, Zoe. You are a brave little thing—to be such a coward. Can't we be friends in the future?" They were emerging from a dark alley into the open street. Zoe tightened her soft grasp on his fingers for a moment, then withdrew her hand and dropped away to a conventional distance.

"You mustn't tell on me if we are to be partners," she said. As she spoke, Girard's eyes lighted on a passing hack, and he signaled to it.

"Come," he said, "we couldn't walk it to save

our lives." When they were safe inside he was the first to speak.

"If we are to be partners," he said very gently, "we must be perfectly frank with each other. Your father trusted me, Zoe, and I think if any man knew his mind, I did. If I did less than all I could for those he loved, I would feel that I was breaking faith with him—now that he is gone. Without any intention of being officious, I am going to say to you what I feel he would have me say. You have been exceedingly imprudent to-night—fearfully so. And imprudent those other times—you didn't think I knew, did you?" he put in, in answer to a quick look from her, "You and Frank are both unwilling to trust to orthodox methods, and you imagine that you can do more than the police and detectives combined. That is a mistake, child, and a mistake that *you* must not make again. It is all well enough for Frank to go nosing about in out-of-the-way places, but for a woman! Why—you must not, that's all."

"I'm not afraid," answered the girl quietly.

"I have heard people talk that way before," said the young man, a little impatiently, "but I fail to see any logic in the statement. Just because you are 'not afraid' is no sign that there is not good reason for fear. You might not be afraid of fire, but that wouldn't keep you from being burned if you walked into it."

Zoe was silent.

"Then too," Girard continued, "if I were you, I

would let Frank or my 'partner' answer Mr. Treadwell's questions, and decide what should be put into his possession. Treadwell is honest," he hastened to add, "and he is doing his best under the circumstances, but I don't think you are the one to deal with him, Zoe."

"How do you know he asked me any questions?"

"I know the man."

"How did you know I had been in that part of town before?"

"Tom Ballard told me he had met you there twice." Silence.

"Now it is my turn," said Girard. "You'd better 'honor bright,' too. What did you go down into that miserable quarter those other times for?"

"To look for father."

"You dear, foolish child! Well, when did you give those photographs to Mr. Treadwell?"

"I really don't remember—a long time ago, though."

"As much as two weeks?" Girard asked, with his mind on the time when he, himself, with Helen's permission, had gone through Mr. Lawrence's papers. There had been no box of pictures in the desk at that time.

"Yes, more than that."

"Did you give Treadwell anything else there?"

"No."

"Did he take anything else from the desk?—any papers or anything of that sort?"

"Why no, he didn't want anything else. I guess if he had, though, I would have let him. I thought we were to use all the means in our power in trying to find out, you know."

"Yes, I know. Zoe, how many times have you talked to Mr. Treadwell when the others were not there?"

"Let me see—Oh, I don't know."

"What sort of questions did he ask you?"

"I don't remember; a whole lot. About everything and everybody, it seemed to me."

"Yes, that is their way, you know. They ask a lot of irrelevant questions along with those of import, to cover up what they are really after. Now, I'll venture he even got you to talking about yourself, and your childhood, and all your likes and dislikes—just as if that mattered."

"He did; and about Frank's and Helen's, too; but he really asked more about *you* than about anyone else."

"Y-e-s. Now let me tell you something, child. It was perfectly natural for you to do as you did. But I would be more careful in the future, if I were you. The next time anything like that comes up, refer Mr. Treadwell to Frank. He is the head of your house in your father's absence, you know; and besides that, he is your guardian."

"Who said so, I'd like to know?"

"Your father said so, the last day he was seen alive." And he told her of the codicil to Mr. Law-

rence's will. Only the silence answered him, and after a few moments he continued, "Do you know the terms of your father's will?"

"I didn't know he had made a will."

"He left his property to be divided equally among you and Frank and Helen."

In the hope of furnishing some clue to the mystery, he had already disclosed the terms of Mr. Lawrence's will to both Frank and the detective; and he now hoped that the knowledge of her adopted father's touching generosity toward herself would do more than anything else toward influencing this wayward girl. But if the girl felt the influence, she made no sign.

The carriage stopped, by Girard's direction, two squares from their destination, and they dismissed it and walked the remaining distance. Zoe had left the gate unlocked and one of the drawing-room windows ajar, so they entered without disturbing the sleeping household.

"Remember," said Girard, as he bade her good-night in a whisper, "if your guardian proves unmanageable, just call on your 'partner.'"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“RELATING TO ZOE”

MR. TREADWELL had not pressed the investigation concerning the antecedents of the younger Miss Lawrence. He had either accepted Girard's refusal to help as final, or he was leaving the thought he had planted in the lawyer's mind to germinate and grow of itself.

If the latter course was the one the detective had adopted, he went about fostering it in the very best way possible. To try to force a conviction on Girard was the very surest way of rousing his inborn stubbornness of intellect. Merely to suggest an idea to him, was to insure his seizing upon, and judging it in all its aspects.

If Girard could have been satisfied on one point, he would have felt no hesitancy as to what course to pursue. If he could have been convinced that Mr. Lawrence was dead, no argument would have persuaded him to entertain the thought of allowing Treadwell to follow up the investigation concerning the parentage of the old man's adopted daughter. Only as offering a possible clue to the whereabouts of the living John Lawrence, did he indulge the idea for a moment. And yet, what right had he to sup-

pose that there was anything relating to Mr. Lawrence's past which would not bear the light; what right indeed but the ugly hint that Treadwell had given him? Still the hint had been caught, and thereby might hang a tale. Just how objectionable the unfolding of that tale might be, he could only guess, but his faith in men was not of the strongest, and his surmises were correspondingly dark. So many reasons against allowing this investigation presented themselves to Girard's mind, that he constantly leaned toward a course of inaction. There was the old man's reputation—than which Sir Galahad's was no whiter; there was Frank; there was the poor little waif of a girl herself; and there was Helen. If Helen could have been eliminated from the question, he might have hesitated no longer. He might have been willing to sacrifice Zoë and the others to whatever the investigation might involve. No man had a right to shrink from the truth, he told himself—but there was Helen.

And yet, Mr. Lawrence might be the victim of kidnappers—might be still alive. Girard was by no means inclined to this idea—indeed he was reasonably sure of its fallacy, and he believed that the detective shared his view of the case; nevertheless, it was a contingency that had to be weighed and considered.

Supposing this to be the right premise, could any sane or honest man go less than all the way to the end? Could he afford to pause when the old man's very life might hang on the issue? Clearly, no.

To a man of his decision of character, this wavering of purpose was as galling as it was foreign. He longed to take hold of the problem in his characteristic way, and his spirit was restive under its restraint.

But there was Helen; and he decided to wait, and think the matter over again. All this and more, Girard pondered as he ate his solitary lunch at the hotel one day. When he had finished, he roused himself from his perplexing speculations, paid his bill, and took his way to Mr. Lawrence's. It was many a long block to his old friend's home, but he decided to walk the distance in the hope that the exercise would help him throw off his troublesome thoughts. In a few minutes, however, his mind was traveling over the same ground again just as surely as his body was swinging along the familiar streets. He had been through Mr. Lawrence's papers but once—the time when Helen gave him the keys—and then it was only to single out some land conveyances. Now he determined to make a thorough investigation, and to take down a memorandum of the contents of the pigeon-holes for future reference. His main object, however, was to find something bearing on the subject Treadwell had last suggested to him. He had decided to get all the evidence that he could, and then say how it should be used.

In a very short while after he presented himself at the front door, Girard was seated before his old friend's desk, going slowly and carefully over its contents. He had sent Helen word that he wished

to examine the papers again, and so was left to himself as he worked. He was grateful to her for this uninterrupted opportunity, for he knew very well that only her admirable generalship could have kept Miss Susan from descending on him when his name was announced. One by one, the envelopes were examined, noted, and laid aside. It was a long and tedious task, but at length it was finished, and Girard sat staring at his notebook, disappointed.

Before closing the desk, he placed several important packages in an inner drawer which had a safe-looking lock of its own. Among these packages was a little velvet case containing a set of diamonds—breastpin and earrings of the old-fashioned rose-cluster setting. He guessed these to have belonged to Helen's mother, and he touched them reverently before laying them away. Shoving the drawer to, he tried to turn the key which he had already fitted to the lock, but the drawer would not slide back far enough to allow the bolt to slip into its socket. He made two or three attempts, and gave vent to several forcible remarks, but all to no effect. At length, exasperated, he jerked the drawer entirely out to see what was defeating him. From the depths of the recess in which the drawer belonged, Girard dragged out the inanimate imp that had so sorely tried him. It was a hypocritically innocent-looking little parcel, tied up with a red string, and marked in Mr. Lawrence's hand, "Relating to Zoe." Greatly surprised, he turned the package over critically. It was small and com-

paratively thin, and was yellowing with age. He pressed it between his fingers for a few minutes,—clearly, it contained nothing but papers.

He next examined the place from which he had taken it, and found that there was the space of half an inch between the flooring of the pigeon-hole above the drawer and the back of the desk. Evidently the parcel had been placed in this upper compartment and had slipped down through the opening to a safe hiding place behind the drawer.

Girard felt that he was probably holding between his fingers the solution of the deep mystery; but what to do with it?—that was the question. For several minutes he held the package, and thought of Treadwell.

He felt that he was at liberty to use his own discretion in the matter. Mr. Lawrence had placed unbounded confidence in him, and had put almost unlimited power in his hands. Mr. Lawrence’s children had not questioned their father’s judgment, but had forced still greater responsibilities upon him. His first impulse was to open and read the papers he held; his next, to hand them over to Treadwell, unopened. Then he thought of the proud young fellow to whom he was morally bound for a settlement of this perplexity, and he put the package back where he found it.

The sound of steps descending the stairs brought Girard to himself, and he closed and locked the desk, and hastened to intercept Frank on his way out.

“One minute,” said he, shaking hands with young

Lawrence, "I want to see you before you go." Frank opened the drawing-room door, and they went in, and closed it after them.

"Have you found out anything?" he asked quickly.

"Not a thing. Not a thing," Girard answered. "It is about something else." The two men sat down, facing each other. Frank's countenance had lost all its eagerness at his friend's reply.

Girard suddenly realized that he was face to face with a difficult proposition. If Frank had been a man of his own type, or if the lawyer had ever succeeded in reducing him to any sort of known quantity, he would not have hesitated as to how to proceed. In view of Frank's uncertain qualities of temperament, however, and especially in view of the complication of circumstances surrounding him, the lawyer reflected that it might be advisable to say less than he knew—for the time being, at least.

"Your father lost a package of papers some years ago," he began deliberately. "I did not, and I do not know the exact contents of the bundle, but I know that he valued it very highly, and put it away so carefully that he, himself, could not find it. Some time back, he came to me and asked if he had not deposited the package with me for safe keeping. I knew nothing of its whereabouts—and, indeed, up to that time, knew nothing of his having such papers in his possession. I found the bundle to-day behind a drawer in his desk where it must have slipped, and so have been lost."

"Well?" said Frank. He was staring at a portrait of his mother with a look in his eyes of being miles away.

"Well," echoed Girard, "I thought it the right thing to put it into your hands."

"Why, I don't know," said the other, "I have turned the business over to you, and I think you are the man to look into the matter. In fact, I'd rather you would."

The two were silent for some time, and then Girard asked cautiously:

"Did you ever think of looking into the matter of Zoe's origin, Frank?"

"No!" The lawyer started at the explosive emphasis of the answer. Young Lawrence had waked up to the present suddenly and fully, and was now watching the face of the man before him with an intentness that was almost unpleasant.

"Do you care to?"

"Certainly not. What's the use?"

"Your father became very anxious about it, toward—the end." The look on Frank Lawrence's face would have deterred another man, but Girard's interest was too keenly aroused to allow him to stop here. "Do you know," he continued, "I have been studying her face lately, and I have come at last to the conclusion that she must be—a—sort of mixture."

Young Lawrence sprang to his feet, his eyes black with fury.

"Repeat that, if you dare!" he exclaimed, advanc-

ing. Girard had risen to his feet in utter astonishment.

"What's the matter with you, Lawrence, are you insane?" he demanded.

"Sane enough to teach you that if Zoe is a mixture, you'd better not say so! Sane enough to convince you that, so far as your words go, now and hereafter, she is *white*—do you hear me!"

"Oh, *that's* it!" exclaimed the other, in astonishment. "Look here, Frank Lawrence, do you suppose I would say such a thing to you, even if I thought it? Aren't there plenty of mixtures in this town besides that damned black and white combination? I meant that she is of unmistakable foreign type, of course." Girard's usually impassive face was the picture of consternation and disgust. There was relief there, too. This was no madman before him.

The clenched hand dropped and the blood surged to Lawrence's face.

"I am a fool," he said, simply, "I misunderstood you."

There was silence between them for a full minute. Frank stood staring down at the table. Presently, however, he looked the other man directly in the eyes.

"Girard," he said, "I owe you an apology."

"Don't mention it, man," said the other, promptly holding out his hand; and as the most comfortable way of closing the awkward incident, he picked up his hat to go.

"One thing, Lawrence," he said, pausing a mo-

ment. “The lost package I mentioned to you, contains things that relate to Zoe. There is a statement to that effect in your father’s hand on the outside of the packet.” He was watching Frank’s expression closely as he spoke and mentally taking down evidence as the young fellow alternately paled and flushed with some hidden emotion. “Don’t you think you’d better take charge of it?” he continued.

“Of course. Where is it? What’s in it?” Frank asked quickly. Girard proceeded to give him minute directions as to how to find the parcel.

“I really can’t tell you what it contains,” he added. “I didn’t open it, of course. Your father asked me about it again, that last day, when he came to my office to make you Zoe’s guardian. He was exceedingly anxious about it then. Don’t you think you’d better put it away in a safer place?”

“No-o, we’ll just leave it there. It seems to be very safely hidden where it is. I should not think of opening it, you know.”

“Well, I think I would put it somewhere else; but that is with you. As long as I am your agent, however, and responsible for your father’s financial affairs, I am going to insist that you go with me now, and give into my possession some business papers I found there that ought to be kept in a strong-box. As for the other things, you can do as you please, of course.”

They went together to the desk; and, in spite of the pain it cost him, Frank examined the contents

with the lawyer's help. When Girard again broached the question of the jewels and the hidden package, Frank drew back, and said he wanted his father's belongings to remain as he had left them, wherever it was possible. At the suggestion of Girard, he did not replace the keys where they had been hanging, but put them on his own key-ring.

Girard went home with a new idea in his head, and the complications which had perplexed him assumed a more menacing aspect than before.

"So *that* is the family skeleton—God! what a grim one! No wonder he cringed when its hiding place was stumbled on. That is what has been to pay between him and Zoe. *That* is what Treadwell is ferreting out! And the old man left her one-third of his property. And the old man is—where?" so Girard pondered; and he walked all the way back to town, trying to come to an understanding with himself.

The lawyer was checkmated. What to do or say in the premises, he had not the slightest idea. He was certain of only one thing under the sun, just now, and that was that he was going to have a thorough understanding with Treadwell as soon as the detective should return to the city.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IGNES FATUI

AFTER his unpleasant, though enlightening, interview with Frank, Girard felt little inclination to frequent the Lawrence home as he had done in the past. There was always Helen to attract him, and somehow, since she had withdrawn herself beyond his reach, the charm of her was becoming more impossible to resist; but Helen had resolutely put him away, and there had begun to creep into his mind the thought that maybe, after all, she would be strong enough to hold out against him. But men of his temperament must hope; and he fought the suggestion with all the strength that was in him.

Some few days after his passage at arms with Frank, Girard swung on a Prytania car one afternoon, and remained on the rear platform to smoke. He had no idea of getting off at the place to which all his thoughts turned, but he wanted a ride, and there was a certain satisfaction in merely passing the home of the girl he loved.

He had taken his cigar from his pocket, when he glanced inside the car and saw Helen. The smoke was instantly abandoned, and he went in and took a seat beside her.

There was something so calm, so reassuring, so

strong about him, that an indescribable feeling of safety came over the girl whenever he was near. She met his direct, earnest eyes now, with a sad smile. He answered the usual questions without leaving her the pain of asking them.

"Nothing definite, yet; Treadwell was to be back some days ago, you know, but he has not put in an appearance. The men at his office claim not to know when to expect him. He is working like a demon, though, wherever he is, and I am sure he is on a trail. We can only hope and wait." After that they changed the subject, and dropped into idle remarks on idle topics, for he was trying to teach, and she to learn, the lesson of self-mastery.

Helen, however, seemed to have something on her mind, and after a little began apologetically:

"I am afraid I've made some trouble for you, Herbert, but I knew you wouldn't mind——"

"You *have* made trouble for me, and I *do* mind."

"You know I don't mean that, now listen: I found the other day the most distressing case I ever heard of. There is a poor widow, out on the lower end of Orange street, in the worst condition you ever saw. She has nothing in the world but a little home, and she has eight children——"

"Her husband was a Methodist preacher, wasn't he?"

"No, what makes you think so?"

"Oh, nothing. There's a mistake somewhere, but go on."

"Well, now she is about to lose her home. There is something the matter with the title, they say. I don't know what it is, but it's something, and it's all mixed up. She knows the house is hers, but there is a mean, villainous man who is going to take it away from her. You see, she needs somebody that knows how, to take hold and straighten it all out for her; so I told her you would be delighted to do it. You see, she hasn't any money to employ a lawyer——"

"What do you call *me*?" he asked.

"Oh, you goose, you! I meant to accent the 'employ,' of course."

"Well, if the titles are as mixed as your account of them, I think I bid fair to be considerably employed. Is the widow good-looking?"

"No, and there is absolutely no mistake about the number—there are exactly *eight*."

His heart gave a bound of joy to hear her speak lightly again, even though the next moment her eyes clouded with remembrance, and he said hopefully:

"I'll keep the cottage for the widow, even if I have to run afoul of the mean, villainous man in the case. When is she coming to see me about it?"

"Why—she isn't coming—you know. She lives way off the car line—and she has so much to keep her busy—so I told her you would drive out there."

"You d-i-d? And when did you tell her I would come?"

"Herbert, are you laughing?"

"No! No, indeed!"

"Well, I told her you would drive out about six o'clock to-morrow afternoon. She is a Mrs. Sloan and she lives at——"

"I positively couldn't find it to save my life. You will have to go with me to show me the way."

"We-l-l. I'm so much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," he said. "Say, let's ride out further and take a stroll. I have something I want to say to you, and I never get a chance to talk to you alone when I come to see you."

This could mean but one thing to Helen. She felt that she ought to get off at home, but she did not. She only rested her chin on her hand and stared at the panorama of palms and magnolias that glided past. At length the scene became ragged and unkempt. The houses were growing fewer and humbler; the weeds were disputing the right-of-way with the cars—nature was asserting herself, and in one of her ugliest moods.

Helen suddenly woke to the consciousness that the other passengers had got off, one by one, leaving them in sole possession of the car, and that Herbert had been talking easily to her along the way.

When they rose, he was telling her something about Zoe, and Helen found it necessary to mention the noise of the car and ask him what he was saying. Girard looked surprised and gave a quick searching glance at her face.

"I said I was uneasy about Zoe," he repeated, as they walked along, "and that I thought it my duty

to tell you about some of her recent escapades." Then he told her, without reservation, of his meeting with Zoe in the house-boat on the night appointed by the Mafia. Not a single detail was omitted. Helen almost held her breath as she followed the story up to the point where he and Zoe stole into the yard together, and he saw her go into the house through the window she had left unfastened for the purpose. Everything else was swept from her mind, and she stopped short in the zig-zag path, and faced him in utter astonishment.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Well, Zoe asked me not to. I didn't promise her, but she took it for granted that I did, so I determined not to tell on her unless I became convinced that I ought to do so. You see, I took the liberty of giving her then some wholesome advice, and was fool enough to believe she would follow it. Indeed, she let me believe that she would."

"Why, for heaven's sake, Herbert! What else has happened?" Girard paused perceptibly before he answered:

"Well, it was this way: Mr. Jones—the one who lives on your block—told me he thought your house was being watched; so I decided to be about the place at unusual hours and execute a little private detective business, myself. Last Tuesday night, I hung around the premises from eleven o'clock till four in the morning. About twelve, I saw a woman come in at the back gate and enter the house through the lattice door

of the gallery. I attached no importance to the incident—thinking it was Sallie, home from a party—till I saw the same thing repeated last night. Then I watched my chance, and as the woman crossed the yard where the light from the street fell full upon her, I struck a stone sharply against the fence to startle her. She jumped and looked round, and I saw——”

“Not *Zoe*!”

“Yes, *Zoe*. She couldn’t see me, for I stood in shadow, but I saw her plainly. She listened, startled for an instant, then darted to the back door, and got in so quickly it looked like magic. Helen, it will not do to trust her as you do. You ought to watch her.” A warning flush sprang to Helen’s face.

“Do you mean——” she began distantly.

“Simply to remind you of what Dr. Nesbitt said,” he answered, retreating from a position he saw he could not afford to hold.

The blood swept out of her face as suddenly as it had sprung to it; and Helen put her hand on his arm.

“*Zoe* is so close to me,” she said contritely, “and I thought you meant—poor little thing, she has not been like herself, at all, but we took it for granted, when her memory came back, that she was all right again. I will watch her after this. Herbert—she was looking for father again!”

“I would certainly keep an eye on her,” he said, as they hurried back to catch the next car. “It is a terrible risk for her to be out that way at night, and it must not be allowed.” Then he added to himself:

“If Zoe is crazy, so am I!”

The self-constituted detective had come to realize that his new calling was no sinecure. His midnight meeting with Zoe at the wharf, and the subsequent incidents that he had related to Helen, had convinced him that there was something in the air which the quixotic girl knew, or suspected, and would not tell the others. On the night of their meeting by the river, he had accepted Zoe's story unquestioningly, and had parted with her, convinced of having established confidence between them. The incidents which had followed, proved to him not only that he had already given too much credence to her statement, but that he could not reasonably hope to maintain a frank confidence with her. But what Zoe knew, or fancied, was what troubled him most.

In the broad daylight of his working hours, Girard despised himself for attaching any importance to the girl's peculiar behavior, and dismissed the matter from his mind with the determination to put a stop to her indiscretions and pay no more attention to her. But as surely as night and relaxation came, just so surely did the mean little suggestion creep in on him again—There was method in Zoe's madness. Could it be possible that Treadwell was daring to use the girl in following his clue, and sending her out—but he dismissed the thought from him. No man who was not a fool or a knave would thus jeopardize a woman's safety; and Treadwell was neither the one nor the

other. Of course Zoe's outrageous escapades were conceived by none but her own daring brain. For Treadwell was a thousand miles away when she went down to the old house-boat in answer to the mysterious summons. But it was possible, and very probable, too, that the detective was utilizing Zoe in other ways as a means of finding out what he wanted to know, for there was the matter of the photographs.

The more Girard thought about it, the more thoroughly he became convinced that Treadwell had appealed to Zoe for the help that he, Girard, was hesitating to give. With the thought, came a wave of deep indignation, and he was more than ever determined to have a distinct understanding with the detective as soon as he should return to the city. In the capacity of a tool in Treadwell's hands, Zoe was no longer a thing to be easily used and thoughtlessly cast aside. She was no longer a fantasy to be relegated to the hours of reflection; she became a problem that threatened to haunt even his busiest days.

To-day he was revolving just how much she knew, and where she could have learned anything unknown to himself. At this juncture the scene on the house-boat came up before him with all its weird suggestiveness. Zoe had been there in the shadow, long before he, himself, had arrived at the levee. Had she found out anything in that dark old hull—anything that she had hidden from him? Why had she screamed when he would have drawn her back into it? Why had she lied to him about it—if indeed she had? Every little

incident of that meeting now teemed with a subtle meaning of its own. He recalled with suspicion, the fact that she had tried to blow out the match he struck, and had hurried him away from the place.

At this point, the lawyer pulled himself together in high disgust at his own imaginings. Why try to explain Zoe's folly? She was a woman, and being such, her actions were not to be explained by any known process of reasoning. So it was, that at one sweep he accounted for all Zoe's inexplicable acts, and at the same time excused himself most satisfactorily for failing to understand her. Two minutes more, however, and he was going over the uncertain ground again. No matter how much the fact of Zoe's being a woman made her easy—well—not to understand exactly, but to "give up" without chagrin, that same fact would certainly render her most difficult to deal with. But be dealt with she must, and that promptly.

His first attempt had been to reach her through Helen, but the latter's indignation at his half-expressed suspicion of Zoe, and her prompt acceptance of his suggestion as to the girl's not being quite sound in mind, impelled him to treat directly with Zoe.

Yet how to treat with Zoe was the question. None knew better than Girard, himself, what a difficult undertaking that might prove; yet even he had little conception of a woman's capacity to torment, and he had great faith in his own powers.

Strong in that faith, he went out to the Lawrences' the day after his talk with Helen, resolved to come to

an understanding with the troublesome girl in question.

He was glad when Helen met him in the hall, for he had depended on her to help him get an interview with Zoe. Following her to the sofa at the far end of the drawing-room, he sat down beside her and said gently:

"Do you remember what I told you yesterday afternoon? Well, I have been thinking the matter over, and I have come to the conclusion that if Nesbitt is right about Zoe, I had better talk to her myself. Knowing that I am actively engaged in the search, she may talk to me freely about it, and so disclose what will-o'-the-wisp illusion she is following." He watched Helen's face closely, and continued, "You see, if we can find out what she imagines she knows, we can pretend to discover something that upsets her theories, and so, maybe, get her to remain quiet. Don't you think I am right?"

"Yes—but, Herbert, Zoe denies that you saw her come into the yard the other night. She gave the same account of your meeting on the boat that you did, and told it quite as sanely; but she insists that it was Sallie you saw the other two nights. You see, you must have been mistaken. Sallie is exactly the same size as Zoe, and is so light-colored that she might easily have been mistaken for a white person in the half-light."

He hated to take the next step, but he was in earnest.

"Tell me one thing, Helen, does Zoe always tell the truth?"

She raised her head quickly and proudly, but Girard looked straight into her eyes and waited for her answer.

"Yes, of course,—that is—in matters of any importance, she does. Like a good many of us, she doesn't consider little deceptions wrong."

"Did you ever know me to lie?"

"No."

"Then I tell you, it *was* Zoe I saw on the second night. It may have been Sallie on the first, but I don't believe it."

She knew that he was telling her the truth, but the truth was unpleasant to hear, and she felt humanly resentful toward the teller of it. Girard saw at once the displeasure in her face, and made a mental note of the fact that, in dealing with the younger girl, he must expect no help in so far as Helen was concerned.

"You said you wanted to talk to Zoe." Helen could be indescribably cool without descending to pettishness.

"Not unless you think it best," he said, his manner changing too. "I only wanted to help you, Helen,—it is hard for me to remember that I am an outsider now." Her eyes filled quickly and she laid her hand on his own as she answered:

"You have always been one of us, Herbert, and since *he* left, you have been the one to guide and uphold us in his stead. I was worried because you caught

Zoe in a story—I have always wanted you to love her.” He turned the hand that hers was resting on, and clasped her fingers in his own as she continued in her old sweet, earnest way:

“Don’t mind my being cross, dear, I have to put forth all the strength and courage in me for the others, and I *have* to give way sometimes, so I take it out on you.” His fingers closed tighter.

“That’s all right, darling, you may batter away on me as much as you please if it does you any good. Be yourself with me, Helen, I love the woman better than the heroine.” She drew her hand away without looking at him, and for a long time they were silent together.

Then they talked of her father; and Helen found a sad comfort in being able to express all her fears and heartaches to the big, strong fellow she had so long leaned upon. Girard’s help was pre-eminently what she needed in the present crisis. He was aggressive, where she shrank back, and hopeful where she only feared, and he never failed to arouse her courage. To-day, he gave her more hope than he felt himself, for despair in her was intolerable to him. At length the conversation drifted back to Zoe.

“I do want you to talk to her,” said Helen. “I am with her so constantly, and I was so stunned at first that I know I may not be able to judge of her condition. You, being away from her at times, will see more clearly if—if there is any change in her. Shall I call her now?” He caught himself so abruptly on

the verge of a smile that his face was grave to grimness, as he asked:

“But your auntie?”

“Oh, auntie is asleep. She’ll not bother you.”

“Don’t you think we’d better not be too business-like with Zoe?”

“That’s all right; I have an engagement with the dressmaker this afternoon, and I will tell Zoe that you are here, and that she must entertain you till I get back. Herbert,” she said, pausing in the doorway, “I wish you would try to make friends with her. It is largely your fault that she doesn’t like you—you know how you’ve always teased her.”

“That is exactly what I am going to do,” he said, confidently, and she went out to find Zoe.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CROSS-EXAMINATION

GIRARD would have resented indignantly the charge of being imaginative; yet when the drawing-room door opened and closed again and Zoe stood before him, he felt that lately he had been guilty of some such weakness.

In the silence of his own room, and in the isolation of the crowded street, he had pondered over Zoe's will-o'-the-wisp characteristics, till she had come to be a dark and suggestive enigma. Fight as he would against the conviction, he had felt it gradually forced upon him that she was a woman even more subtle—perhaps more unworthy—than she had already shown herself to be. But as she stood with her hands behind her and her back to the door, she became again a slender, innocent-faced girl with bows of black ribbon on her hair, and a dimple in each cheek.

“Hey-o, Herbert!”

“Hey-o, yourself! Aren't you sorry Helen had to go to the dressmaker's?” She gave him her hand to shake, and they crossed the room to a window and sat down, facing each other.

“Auntie'll be in, in a minute,” she said. “I woke her up and told her you were here.” For a moment Girard looked disconcerted, but he brightened quickly.

"You needn't try to fool me," he declared; "you wouldn't dare to wake Miss Susan from a nap. Don't I know her?" Zoe broke into a merry little laugh that did him good to hear.

"I'm satisfied," she exclaimed. "I suspected you had honored *me* with this visit. By-the-way, how many chickens did you catch?"

"How many—what? When?"

"Why, the other night when I saw you prowling around our back yard." If she had turned the hose on him, she would not have come so near taking his breath away.

"Zoe! Aren't you ashamed of the way you have acted?"

"No."

"Not ashamed of telling Helen a story?"

"I didn't do it."

"Why, Zoe!"

"I never, I tell you. Helen came to me and told me that you thought you saw me come in the back way after midnight, and I said you were 'crazy.' Do you call that a story?"

"I most certainly do. It is just as wrong to lead a person to believe a falsehood, as it is to tell one deliberately, and you know it." Girard suddenly waked up to the fact that he had come to make friends with Zoe, and here he was, taking her metaphorically by the back of the neck and shaking her, after his usual way of dealing with refractory things.

"I am so glad you have found that out," she said

incisively. "It must have been after you pretended you would not tell on me, and then went and told Helen all about that night on the levee."

"I told it for your own good, Zoe, but not till you had broken faith with me. I didn't really promise you, but I knew you thought I did, and I would never have told on you, if you had not, yourself, broken our tacit compact. I was horrified, child, that you should run the risk of being out at night by yourself like that. You don't know what a risk you were running. Why, no man that is a man could allow a girl to be so imprudent. You don't understand, Zoe, but I had to stop it. I knew Helen would not believe such a thing of you, unless I could prove that you were just that daring—she would think I was mistaken—so I told her about the time on the wharf to show her how reckless you are. Besides, I don't see why you should object to her knowing about that particular occasion, after it was too late for her to stop you. It is exactly what she wanted to do herself, and what she would have done, if Frank had allowed her to. How could she blame you for it?"

"You never heard of women's blaming other people for what they do themselves, did you?"

"Lots of times. Look here, wasn't that a queer escapade of ours? It makes me feel creepy when I think of it." He was watching her narrowly.

"It certainly was"—she dropped into a confidential, gossipy tone. "It rather spoils it, though, that it should have turned out to be nothing after all."

"I am sorry," he said in the same tone, but observant still, "I am sorry I didn't know sooner that you were there; I might have saved you that fright." Zoe looked at him with the expression of one who had lost his oars.

"Sooner! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. When you spoke to me—was that the first you knew of my being there?"

"It *was* the first of your being there. I saw you come down the levee three minutes before, the sky was behind you."

"Didn't you see me by the old sugar-house just before that?" The girl promptly assured him she was not cat enough to see a man 'miles' away in the dark. She was so little disconcerted by learning that he had been in a position where he might watch her, that Girard began to lose confidence in his theories concerning her. All through the conversation, he had kept his eyes on her in the hope that some traitorous expression would give him a clue to her thoughts, but she was evidently either mistress of herself or perfectly innocent. He decided with some chagrin, that there was no use trying to surprise her into betrayal of herself, so he changed his tactics.

"Zoe, I asked for your confidence once before, and if you had trusted me, our compact would never have been broken. It is so necessary for us to be friends—real friends, I mean. I need somebody to be confidential with and so do you. There are reasons why Frank and your sister won't answer. Now if you will

tell me everything you know about this affair, I'll confide in you, and we may be able to help each other." He paused for her answer, but she only looked at him very earnestly. He decided to continue the experiment.

"Tell me the whole truth, Zoe. Didn't you see someone in that boat?" She pressed her lips close together, but after a second or two, nodded, slowly. Something of the unreasoning fright that had possessed her that night seemed to come over her, but Girard was too eager to wait till she was composed.

"Tell me about it, Zoe! Was it a man or a woman. Didn't he frighten you nearly to death?"

"A man," she answered, and her voice broke.

"Good God, child! did he offer you any violence? What did he say?"

"No, no. He asked me why I had come, and I told him I was father's daughter as well as Helen, and he shook me and said the time was past."

"Well, if that doesn't beat——! What sort of looking man was he?"

"Horrible—mean and meddlesome-looking."

"How was he dressed? Would you know him again?" He was on fire with eagerness. The girl leaned forward in excitement, and shuddered as she answered:

"He had on black trousers turned up at the bottom and a great broad-brimmed Mexican-looking hat and a mackintosh. Wasn't he a fool to wear a mackintosh when every star in the heavens was shining?"

Girard grew white with anger. "Don't quarrel with me," she pleaded, "it isn't my fault that I didn't have a thrilling experience. You wouldn't believe me when I told you the truth, and you came here to trap me. Let's call it even and start over again."

"We'll see about that when you explain your subsequent behavior," indignantly.

"You have neither the power nor the right to make me explain, Mr. Herbert Girard; but considering the fact that you may yet be my brother-in-law I think I'll tell you for the sake of family peace, if you can be satisfied with anything short of a sensation. I heard Mr. Jones tell you that he thought this place was being watched, and I came to the same decision that you did and determined to see if it were so. I fixed myself up as much like Sallie as possible, and went out into the alley and watched, but I didn't see a single suspicious-looking person, except a certain high and mighty barrister. It's really curious, isn't it, that whenever I go out in search of meanness, I unearth *you!*"

Her story was so frank and open, and her thrust at him so bedimpled and good-natured, that he could not help smiling at his own expense.

"Tell me one thing," he said, good-humoredly, "and I'll not ask another question. You went out so bravely to capture those wretches; now why, in the name of common sense, did you run so at the very first sound?"

"To get away, of course."

"Zoe, I wish I could shake you!"

"You'd better not try it," she laughed. "I saw old Cyrus get the worst of it at the hands of our next-door kitten the other day. If I hadn't interfered, there's no telling what would have become of him."

"*You* helping Cyrus out! Since when did you and he end your vendetta?" He wished instantly that he had not said it, for the laughter died out of her face as if never to return, and the sweet mouth became drawn and white.

"Zoe," he continued, earnestly, "can't you and I make friends on the same ground? I was in earnest when I told you that I wanted us to trust each other, and I am in earnest about it still. We have had battles royal when you were little enough to be pinched; but I am not your enemy, child, I wish I could make you believe that."

"Maybe you can, by going about it in the right way."

"How? What is the right way?"

"Show yourself a friend."

"In what way have I been unfriendly to you? Let your good sense answer, Zoe."

"You might have told me that I was imprudent, instead of going to Helen with it, and making her lecture me—and breaking your promise."

"I did tell you, and begged you not to go around by yourself that way. And you deceived me."

"How was I to know there was any harm in going out to the carriage-house door?"

"Why, I don't suppose there was any harm in that;

but still, if I were you, I would stay in the house at night, especially after what Mr. Jones said." He paused a moment, and then asked, "Will you give me another trial?"

She looked into his eyes for a full minute, and then laid her hand in the one he was holding out to her.

"Have you found out anything, Zoe?" he asked.

"No—not a thing."

"Are you going to keep up this foolish—this mad search of yours?"

"Always."

"Won't you confide in me? Let me be with you if you will go, to keep you out of folly and danger?" He thought she nodded. "Zoe, I want to tell you something—something that I have purposely hidden from the others—somehow you are different from them and I think can bear it——"

"What is it?" she cried. "For heaven's sake don't keep me in suspense—can't you speak?"

"Why, it is this: I believe, in spite of Treadwell's skepticism on the subject, that your father, dead or alive, is in the hands of the Mafia, but for God's sake don't tell Helen." She did not start; only her eyes changed, but the change struck him cold as he sat.

"I have thought so, too," she said in a wild whisper, "till—till—lately!"

"And what has made you change your mind lately?" He did not take his eyes off her face.

"I have seen him!"

Girard sprang to his feet, but stood tense and silent

to hear her finish—"I have seen him in my sleep—and now I see him whenever I shut my eyes—out there on the old plantation—he is just a few feet under ground, Herbert, let's you and me go look for him—the others won't believe!" Girard laid his hand on the table to steady himself from the sudden relief to the tension of his nerves.

"My God, girl, you gave me such a turn!" He caught himself quickly and looked into her wild eyes with intense concern. "We will look, dear, of course we will—and you won't do anything without me? Promise me that, Zoe."

He took her cold little hand in both his own, and said many tender, soothing things to her. So earnestly did he strive to quiet her strange mood, that by the time Helen returned, the mad light had died out of the black eyes and they had softened again to their velvety languor.

When Girard bade good-by to the two a little while later, he drew Helen into the hall and whispered:

"Watch her, watch her closely!"

Back in his own room that night, Girard arraigned himself sternly for having allowed his imagination to run away with his judgment. The reputedly shrewdest member of the New Orleans bar had allowed his wits to be led hither and thither by the most fantastic *ignis fatuus* that ever danced in a haunted brain. Yesterday, he was studying a deep, mysterious woman; to-day, he was soothing a half-mad girl. And the height of his absurd imaginings was measured to him by the

fall in his self-esteem. Yet it was a positive relief to feel that some of the intricate complications had suddenly been swept away. He had, at least, reduced Zoe to a known quantity, and he felt that he now knew how to reckon with her.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SINDBAD THE SAILOR

DAY after day, Girard visited the office of the detective in the hope that he had returned to the city. Each time, however, he received the same answer—"Mr. Treadwell had been detained in Chicago, but hoped to be home shortly."

The detective wrote to him twice, but the letters were short, and would have been most unsatisfactory, had they not contained hints of new and unexpected developments. This being the only instance in which the detective had admitted to Girard that there were any developments at all, the latter felt encouraged to hope that he and Treadwell might come to a clear understanding as soon as they should meet. He still believed that the other man had made unfair use of Zoe in following his clue, and he was still determined that in the future the girl should take no part in the actual search. Just how far she could be saved from the consequences of that search, remained to be seen. What connection her history had with the tragedy, and what the solution of the mystery would mean to the girl herself, Girard could not even guess. He was sure of one thing, however,—that natural though she was generally, Zoe Lawrence's mind still trembled in the balance between sanity and distrac-

tion. He felt that if the trying suspense could become even a sorrowful certainty, the unsettled mind of the girl would rebound on the spring of its own youth and vigor—unless—unless there should be disclosed something which would cause it to swing the wrong way! Thus was he always vacillating in these days of perplexity—this man of prompt decision and clear judgment.

The days were not many before Girard began to find himself encumbered like Sindbad the Sailor. He had made friends with Zoe, and she persisted in chumming with him to a degree that tried his soul. He had asked her confidence, and was monopolized during his visits at her home, was stopped on the streets in the most out-of-the-way localities, and even haunted in his office and made to listen to the wildest, most nonsensical theories the imagination could invent. He humored her, however, and daily pretended to attempt and fail in the schemes which her fancy built up for him.

Girard had his A. M. sheepskin locked up in a trunk with other plunder, but he was now going to school again, and to a poor wandering wit of a pedagogue, learning the very A B C's of patience. Verily his need of Treadwell was growing day by day.

Just as matters got to the point where he felt that he could not possibly stand the suspense any longer, he received a telegram which said:

“Off for N. Y. Home in ten days. Don't write. Treadwell.”

Girard was in his office when the message was handed him, and if the sandy-haired typewriter had not been at his elbow, he would have said something forcible. As it was, he frowned like a Bombastes Furioso, and went to work at his desk with savage vigor.

Before his temper had had time to cool, there came a knock at the door which, light though it was, made him start and rise hastily.

"There is that wild little devil again," he said to himself, and he flung open the door. "Good-morning, come in." If the little devil in the doorway had been very wild, she would have taken instant flight at sight of the countenance with which he greeted her. As it was, she smiled and came in, and seated herself in his own revolving chair, leaning carelessly over the half-written letter on his desk.

"It's cooler in the other room," he suggested, quickly. In a few minutes he had her safely ensconced in the adjoining room, where the stenographer could not hear the conversation, and where Zoe's narrow, black eyes could catch nothing of the unfinished letter to Treadwell.

"Now, Zoe," he began as soon as they were seated, "didn't I tell you that it is not proper for you to come here by yourself? And didn't you promise me not to do it again?"

"Yes, I know," she said, her eyes becoming excited, "but, you see, I just had to."

"No, you didn't 'just have to.' You don't 'just

have to' do anything that is unbecoming in a young lady and that you know your father would not like." He felt no interest in discovering what mad notion had brought her here. He was interested only in trying to make her live up to his own and her father's very strict code, and he was provoked at her constant violation of its tenets.

"Didn't I promise to tell you everything?"

"Yes, yes," he said, resignedly.

"*Everything?*"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, this is one thing that I am *not* going to tell you."

"Why?" He was interested at once.

"Because you are mean and priggish—and because you won't believe."

"Why won't I believe?"

"Just because. You didn't believe what I told you about Mr. Dawson's hiring a white farm hand, till he told you himself."

"I did believe about Dawson's hiring the man, child. It was all that foolishness about the new man's being in disguise, and spying about the place, that I knew you were mistaken about." He suddenly remembered that he had pretended to accept her theory, and to have it investigated—"I mean I found out your mistake, don't you remember?"

"Yes." She answered him in a manner that plainly told him she was not going any further.

"Well, don't get mad, now. What was the other

—the one thing you were not going to tell me? Out with it! You know you are dying to. You'll not? Oh, well then, I'll not show you that telegram I got just now."

"Give it to me this instant!"

"Tell me what you know."

"Will you give me the telegram afterward?"

"Sure!"

"Mr. Treadwell is in town," she said, softly.

"What!"

"Mr. Treadwell—is—in—New—Orleans."

"No, surely not." In spite of the fact that he believed the girl to be unbalanced, she always worried and interested him strangely with her vagaries till he had time to think them over afterward and apply the searchlight of common sense to them. "How did you get that notion into your head?" he added.

"By meeting him, face to face, a half-hour ago. He was disguised, but I knew him."

"Oh, he was 'disguised.' " Girard knew now that she was mistaken. She was holding out her hand for the telegram, so he handed it to her. He had expected one glance to satisfy her of her mistake, for she seemed almost normal this morning, but Zoe gave him back the message, with consternation in her eyes.

"Then why did I see him?" she persisted.

Girard was tired of pretending to her, so he determined to convince her of her mistake.

"You did not see him, Zoe, but somebody very like him."

"Yes I did, too, and the other man was with him."

"What other?"

"The white-hired man—the stranger from the plantation." In spite of himself, Girard had a curious, fleeting sensation of conviction.

"Where was it? How did they look? Tell me all about it," he said.

"It was at the corner of Carondelet and Common. I didn't see them till I was right up to them, and they passed so quickly that I lost sight of them immediately."

"Did you speak to Treadwell?"

"No, I didn't know him then."

"Well, how did you know him afterward?"

"I remembered him, and the look in his eyes. It would take more than whiskers to fool me."

"This man had whiskers, then?"

"Yes, his face looked like a blacking-brush." In spite of a dozen other questions which Girard put to her, the girl could give no more satisfactory description than this of the man she had seen with Dawson's new employe. She stoutly maintained, however, that the stranger was Treadwell, and Girard at length gave up trying to convince her that her eyes had deceived her.

"I am sure you are mistaken, Zoe," he said, as he escorted her down the stair that led to the street, "nevertheless, I would not say anything about this to anybody—not even to Frank or Helen." And Zoe promised to follow his advice.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE MYSTERY OF VIEUX CARRÉ

GIRARD was not the man to seek trouble or to go rambling about in unsavory places for adventure. He knew full well that his part in the summary dealing with the Mafia must have brought down upon him the unqualified condemnation of the order. Feeling this, he would not have chosen to resort to that part of the city where the Italians congregated; still, he had no idea of allowing the thought of probable danger to hamper his movements, and he went about his business wherever and whenever it demanded his presence. Life was as dear to him as to other vigorous, wholesome-minded men, but freedom of thought and action was dearer, and he would readily have risked the one for the other.

One afternoon in early October, the matter of a last will and testament called him to the home of a client in the lower end of Ursulines street, and he promptly answered the summons.

A long ride took him to his destination,—a quaint, tile-roofed, irregular dwelling of the old French type. The dark-eyed woman who answered the sound of the huge knocker, greeted him in creole French, and gave him hurried and voluble explanations as she piloted him upstairs to the sick chamber. Then fol-

lowed a tedious, trying hour, in which he sat by the bed of the dying creole, and attended to the business for which he had been summoned.

If Girard had really possessed the cold impassiveness for which he got credit—a reputation his manner and appearance too nearly justified—he would scarcely have felt the wave of relief which swept over him when he emerged at length from the scene of death and shadow into the welcome light of the open street.

For five or ten minutes he stood on the nearest corner, waiting impatiently for the delayed car. Then, stimulated by the first fresh breath of fall on the breeze, and lured by the thought of waiting comforts, he decided to tarry no longer, and started with a quick, buoyant step toward home. The prospect of some two miles ahead of him only whetted his appetite for the exercise.

The first half dozen blocks of his walk lay through that portion of the city which bears upon it the stamp of three nationalities.

Here had risen, humble enough in the beginning, the first French capital of the New World—the dream-city of the unfortunate Bienville.

Here, after a deluge of fire had almost swept the city from the earth, the haughty Spaniard re-built it after Spanish modes and Spanish ideas, only to see it crumble—as all the power of Spain in the great West has crumbled—to the very dust; then to see it builded gradually, more extensively, and more permanently by the undaunted French again. Time, the destroyer, has

laid his hand upon all that the Spaniard has wrought here; and in a few short years at best, the Castilian will be immortalized by that one moment only which time cannot destroy—the traditions of the people.

Here, also, is to be found that other Latin race that has played, and is possibly destined to play again, a dramatic part in the history of "Little Paris." The olive-skinned hordes that have drifted in from Naples and Palermo, have grafted themselves upon the life of this quarter,—not building and establishing for themselves, as the French and Spanish did, but fastening on the life they found, like parasites,—many of them taking up all sorts of lawful and unlawful relations with the negroes that swarm the vicinity.

But the most foreign thing in that quarter this afternoon—the most foreign to its life, its ideals, its traditions—was the native-born, English-blooded, English-speaking citizen who was wending his way from the bedside of the sick man on Ursulines street toward American New Orleans.

No other corner of the New World is so very, very *old* as this. None other is so quaintly suggestive of Old World romance and Old World sin. Here, if nowhere else on earth, the past and present meet, and there is no spell or charm to exorcise the ghost-memories that walk this history-haunted ground.

The sun had gone down, but a yellow radiance lingered in the track of his chariot wheels and touched the gloomy old buildings with an ineffable charm;—so had the sun of progress set on this quaint, Old-

World portion of the great city, this erstwhile home of French and Spanish chivalry; so the after-glow of romance lingered on it still.

But the poetry of it was lost on Girard; poetry usually was. The past had no attraction for him and he resolutely kept it behind him. His heart, or his soul, was scarcely able to make room for it; and so, all unawares, was wont to turn an angel away. Only the present and the future he cared to make his own,—the present with its never-ending, burning, passionate struggle for peace, and the future which promises, but to betray.

So, with a feeling of aversion, the lawyer put away from him the dim suggestiveness of the scene, and soon became deeply absorbed in thoughts of his own affairs.

While his mind was thus turned in upon itself, he suddenly remembered that he had intended to return by way of St. Philip street to get a passing view of some property that he then had in litigation for a client. The street that he had intended to visit now lay six blocks behind him, but he turned and retraced his steps. He passed the familiar landmarks, gazing at them with the unseeing eyes of preoccupation, and taking no thought of the soft-eyed, picturesque inhabitants of the streets and gutters, save to despise them with his whole Anglo-Saxon heart.

After walking a few blocks, however, he found himself pausing—he knew not why—in the light of an open door, and examining one of those queer death

notices one so often sees in the foreign quarter of New Orleans. It was the usual black-bordered square of paper, and was printed in Italian, but the bow of crêpe tacked above it spoke to the passer-by in the universal language of sorrow.

Girard gave only a fleeting glance at the notice, but that was enough to satisfy him that it was in a language which expressed nothing to him. However, as he had never looked in on such a scene, his curiosity was mildly excited, and he turned from the black-draped death notice and entered the portal through which the lights glimmered. In the old foreign quarter of New Orleans, as among the negroes everywhere, death opens the door to every passer-by, and claims from the most alien the tribute of a curious glance.

The room was dark with the stains of time and usage and squalid in all its appointments, but some meager attempts had been made to render it decent and attractive. The doorway was draped with ragged lace curtains which were looped back with strings that might once have been ribbons. A few chairs had been placed against the wall, and two of these were occupied by dark-eyed, silent women who greeted the entering stranger with respectful nods.

A coffin stood on a bier in the center of the room, with the usual accompaniment of candle and crucifix. There were flowers, too, a small bunch of the brilliant, weedy blossoms of autumn, that dare show their faces only after all real flowers have passed

with the passing summer. Girard recognized the tightly-tied bouquet as of the kind usually hawked about the streets of New Orleans by the most unpicturesque flower-girls on earth, and he could but wonder if the watchers had not gone hungry to purchase it. Here in the Italian Quarter, as in the pretentious homes on St. Charles avenue or in the wildest habitations of the savage—wherever the heir to immortality wanders—is to be found this irrational fetichism, the useless, the pathetic, the supreme sacrifice of Life to Death.

The young man stood for some minutes, hat in hand, gazing on the poorly painted coffin; but the fascination of death summoned him closer. He walked quietly up to the open casket and looked down into the face of the sleeper.

A deep scar, only a shade less white than the white face, seamed one cheek.

It was with a supreme effort that Girard preserved his outward calm, for the ice struck through him at sight of the well-known face. It was Francisco who lay before him. But it was Francisco stripped of servility, of cringing, of fear,—raised immeasurably above the earthy, withdrawn into mystery, wrapped about with the solemn dignity of death.

“Mafioso see me speak with you, I die.” The words came to Girard out of the past. Were they prophecy? Was this the fulfillment?

Only eternity would say if there had been a sacrifice.

With a strange, tightening feeling in his chest, Girard turned away from the inscrutable mystery of that serene silence, and made a strong effort to bring himself back to the living world again.

The pitiful bunch of flowers and the drawn faces of the two women were the first things that he saw in coming back out of his reverie, and he hastily emptied his pockets of nearly all the money he had with him, laid it in the willing palms of the watchers, and hurriedly left the scene.

Glad to get out again into the open air and the wholesomeness of life, he took a long breath as he left the flickering candles behind. But he carried out of that scene something that had not entered it with him, and that was a well-developed, well-defined sense of his own personal danger.

Reaching St. Philip street, he turned northward and quickened his steps, for the neighborhood was ragged and disreputable. Before he realized it, the shadows of night had crept out of the corners and hidden places where they are wont to lurk, and had spread over the scene like an infection. Few, and far between, the street lights twinkled into life, but they were scarcely more than a mild protest against the surrounding darkness. A little more, and the mysterious crannies and dark places which abound in the Italian Quarter had swallowed up the chattering crowds of the street.

Girard now had the narrow sidewalk almost to himself. A sense of relief at the growing quiet roused

him from haunting thoughts of the dead man behind him. He became interested in the scene about him. It was all so dim, so reposeful, so nearly deserted. In spite of himself, he was drifting with the current of his imagination; the spirit of the hour was upon him—the suggestion of mystery, of lurking evil.

Girard took a surer look about him as he proceeded. One of the tile-roofed piles across the street struck his fancy, and he was studying its peculiar outlines by the light of the street lamp in front of it, when he ran against and almost knocked down a small figure that stepped out of an arcade. In his instinctive effort to keep the woman from falling, he caught her by both arms and thus brought her face to face with him. The next instant he fell back in blank amazement, but he kept a tight grip on her arm.

“Are you mad sure enough?” he exclaimed, when he looked into her upturned face. “What does Helen mean by letting you go about like this?” It was Zoe’s face, Zoe’s figure—Zoe—but not Zoe’s dress and speech. She was cowering away from him in abject terror, and chattering *Italian* to his unbelieving ears:

“Non sei tu! Non sei tu! Dimmi su, dimmi su! Dimmi, dimmi, di su presto. Ah s’egli qui fosse!” she panted to him, sinking down on the sidewalk and trying to writhe out of his grasp.

“No, I won’t—whatever that is! Where in heaven’s name did you learn that gibberish? Zoe, for God’s sake, behave yourself and come home!”

But he might as well have implored her in Greek. It required his utmost to keep his hold on her, for she struggled at the hand that held her like a captive fury. Girard the while was making a desperate effort to read the face that she took no pains to hide from him; but the light was so poor, and fell at such an awkward angle, that a horrible feeling of uncertainty took possession of him. This he could not bear. She was on her knees to him now.

"Non sei tu! Non sei tu! Dimmi su, dimmi, dimmi su! Per così vedermi!" she pleaded again and again. Girard could endure the scene no longer; he felt that he must end it, but that he must know the truth. For one moment he had been so absolutely certain that the girl before him was Zoe Lawrence that he would not have failed to assure himself of the identity of his captive for any price. He knew perfectly well what a risk he was running—not from the police—the police sleep uncommonly soundly in the Italian Quarter—but from the hidden, murderous hate of its inmates.

Suddenly an idea came to him. A feeble light issued from the tunnel-like arch out of which the girl had come. This might prove better than the flickering street light so far away.

Much as he disliked to exert his strength against a woman, he suddenly took the figure at his feet by both arms and half forced, half carried, her back into the tunnel from which she had come. Here they were indeed alone. The arcade was low and damp and

long; at one end was the quiet, shadowy street, at the other a tangled mass of autumn-tinted vines that concealed—he knew not what. Some six feet up the side of the wall hung a crucifix, before which two dripping candles burned. It was to this light that Girard carried his mysterious captive, but before he reached it an eerie fear took possession of him—the girl had ceased to struggle. Another step or two and the feeling became so strong that he released her and stepped back.

With the relaxing of his grasp, the limp figure waked to life with a tigerish quickness, but Girard was quick himself, and had counted on this.

“No, you won’t!” he exclaimed, checking her intended escape with a movement as swift as her own. He would have taken hold of her again, but she shrank back against the wall, and made the sign of the cross.

“Well, just consider me exorcised,” he said grimly, “but I’ll have one good look at you before I go.” He promptly took down one of the flickering candles and held it in front of her. If Zoe Lawrence had lent her little body to be inhabited by an alien spirit and carried wherever its fitful fancy led—this creature—this child or woman—might well have been the unholy result. From the crown of black tresses to the little feet that were plainly visible under the short, tight skirt it was Zoe. But the half-foreign, half-American style of the shabby garments and the wholly foreign way in which they were worn belonged most

certainly to the Italian Quarter. The eyes were foreign, too—foreign, at least, to Zoe. There was the same straight brow, the same wonderful lashes, the same midnight blackness under them; but the narrow, sweeping languor and the sudden dare-devil flash that he knew so well were missing.

The wide-eyed, frightened innocence with which this girl watched him—like a creature charmed by that which it fears and hates—had nothing of Zoe in it. But the painful scrutiny was over in a moment, for a gust of wind through the tunnel extinguished the light in Girard's hand, and made the remaining candle under the crucifix flicker wildly.

The scene took on again its dim uncertainty. The vines swayed and rustled in the wind. The helpless, pathetic little figure almost flattened itself against the dank, dark wall. *This* was not Zoe! He had seen that in the moment when he held the candle to her face. A wave of contrition swept over the big fellow. What must this poor little dago not have suffered under his rough blundering! He stepped aside to let her pass, and, not wishing to frighten her further by approaching her again, tossed toward her a silver dollar. It rang on the stones between them. The girl dived to the pavement, almost within the terrible danger of his grasp, clutched up the coin, together with a handful of dirty débris, and darted through the vine-curtain into the darkness beyond. Girard looked after her with a smile of pity and disgust.

"That I could have thought it!" he exclaimed.



SHE SHRANK BACK AGAINST THE WALL.



Without thinking or caring to replace the candle before the shrine, he tossed it from him and hurried out into the street. He had allowed his imagination to trick him again, and he was just taking himself severely to task for his error, when his mind veered unexpectedly in the opposite direction. He halted suddenly some four blocks from the scene of his adventure.

“By all the fiends in hell, that *was* Zoe!” he exclaimed aloud. He wheeled in his tracks and hurried back, unconscious of the mild sensation his exclamation had occasioned among a few loungers at the corner. “I’m a fool—a consummate fool! Why did I leave her there in that masquerade?” he kept saying to himself. It took a very short time to retrace his steps, and he soon located the spot by the quaint building that had attracted his attention. The neighborhood was as quiet as before, save for a few pedestrians here and there. He found the arcade and entered. There was no one there. He looked at the crucifix to assure himself that he had not been dreaming, and started. There were *two* candles burning before the shrine. He glanced quickly about the floor for the one he had thrown down, but it was not to be found. Then he went up to the shrine and examined the candles before it. One of them was stained with earth. A superstitious dread was laying hold of him, and he despised himself that it was so. When he realized that he was allowing himself to be afraid, he shook off his mood savagely and walked straight

to the far end of the arcade, parted the vines, and stepped through. He found himself in a small, dirty court that was nearly choked up with a rank growth of olives and grapevines. On all four sides rose the irregular walls of foreign-looking houses. Here and there up their uneven expanses, faint lights twinkled from tiny windows, and higher still were the stars and the crescent moon. The soft, nebulous light of an unclouded night helped him to fix the surroundings in his memory. There were several shadowy stairways leading off the court—the one across the area seemed to be boxed up at the sides. He instantly distrusted it. Was it his fancy that sent strange, dim noises echoing through it? A few paces straight ahead and a few more to the left would bring him to it. But to what purpose? The court was evidently surrounded by numberless tenements, and hundreds of people might, and most probably did, have access to it. To look for anyone here—anyone who chose to escape—were worse than folly. Girard realized this, but he would have persisted in his search if he had not again become bewildered with doubt.

“That was a mere child,” he said to himself; “she was smaller than Zoe, and younger by at least five years. If I am not shut up in an insane asylum, and that quickly, I’ll hurt somebody, sure!”

With this, he again set his face homeward. Arrived at Canal street, however, the mean, contemptible little doubt insinuated itself into his thoughts again; so,

instead of going to supper, Girard went directly to the Lawrence home.

His ring at the gate was promptly answered by a servant, who told him that the family were all out " 'cep' Ole Miss and Miss Zoe."

"I want to see Miss Zoe, then, Tom," he said, and Tom ushered him into the sitting-room, where he found Zoe stretched out on the sofa. The girl sat up promptly, straightened her dress, and held out her hand to him with a smile. Girard did not go forward.

"What is the matter with you?" she demanded, after he had stood for a full minute staring at her and not offering to take her outstretched hand.

He roused himself with a laugh, and grasped her slender fingers, saying:

"I am crazy, child; either that or the biggest fool in Orleans Parish."

"Oh, poor fellow, it's just as I have feared," she said, with dimpled maliciousness. "Come sit here by me and tell me all about it."

He took the place she made beside her on the sofa, and, without further asking, told her to the minutest detail his peculiar experience. He was himself so intensely interested in his story that he at first failed to note its effect on his listener. She had met him to-night in one of her sanest moods, and so had failed to remind him, by any little wild eccentricity, of his wonted care not to excite her.

When it was too late, however, and he had finished the story, he saw to his dismay that the girl was in a fever of excitement. The vivid color that usually manifested itself in her full lips only, now burned with painful brilliance under the transparent surface of each cheek, the languorous black eyes were star-like in their illusive brilliance. She had risen to her feet with her hands clasped tightly together.

“Herbert, let’s go right back and find her. She’s *I*, or somebody belonging to me—oh, *do* come!”

The young man caught and unclasped the nervous fingers—he noticed that they were cold and clammy as he touched them—and he tried to laugh naturally as he said:

“No, sir, you don’t get me back there. I am this kind of person, I know when I’ve got enough. But, seriously, child, it was all a fancied likeness, of course. I told you the story merely to amuse you, and to show you what a blundering fellow I can be when I try.”

“Oh, you needn’t talk to me. I know—I know. I have dreamed it—I have felt it all along—there’s somebody here that is the real me—and this me—don’t tell Helen—isn’t me at all—it’s an evil thing sent down upon them—it’s——”

“Come here, you little goose,” he exclaimed, quickly drawing her down beside him and trying to speak reassuringly. “The idea of such a thing! Don’t you know I was making up the whole thing from first to last to get my tag back? Now I have paid you for fooling me about that ‘mean, meddlesome-looking

man' that met you on the *Lafitte*. Don't you remember?"

"And it wasn't true?" Her eyes were still shining unnaturally.

"Not a word of it; and the joke is on you. Let's call it even." He was decidedly uncomfortable, for the girl had not once taken her eyes off him. At that moment his glance fell upon a deck of cards that lay on the marble base of the pier-glass. He picked it up, and began clearing a small table, in a business-like way.

"Come here," he said; "I am going to show you how to play poker."

"I don't want to learn."

"Why? You are always teasing me to teach you."

"Auntie doesn't want me to learn."

"Well, if there's anything in this world that you prefer to what 'auntie doesn't want you to learn' I haven't discovered it."

"Well, then, I am not going to," she declared. Nevertheless, she sank into the chair opposite him.

"But you see I am your 'company,' and you will have to play, if I want you to, for the sake of politeness. Besides, it will be such fun to get ahead of your auntie." He shuffled the cards, and began an elaborate explanation of the game.

"Show me how to cheat at poker," she broke in in the midst of his explanations. Girard looked at her keenly.

"That I have not made a study of," he answered,

and he went on with his instructions. He achieved his purpose, however, for in a little while he had her deeply interested. Zoe caught the principles of the game with quickness enough to make the battle interesting to her opponent. When Girard rose to go, two hours later, he had the satisfaction of seeing that her spirits were restored to their normal calmness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

HELEN FINDS HERSELF

ON his way out, Girard met Frank and his sister returning from a walk. When Helen's hand was laid in his, in greeting, his eyes changed quickly, and he put his hat back on the rack.

"Is it too late for me to stay a little while longer?" he asked.

"Certainly not," said Frank and his sister at the same time, and they turned to the sitting-room door.

"I want to speak to you, Helen, please," and Girard opened the door of the drawing-room opposite. Frank followed them in, but remained only long enough to light the gas and raise the front windows, which had been lowered to keep out the dust. When he bowed himself out, it was with an apprehensive glance at his sister.

Helen removed her hat and gloves and sank into a chair by the window.

"What is it?" her eyes asked of Girard, as he came over and seated himself facing her.

"I can't stand this forever, Helen," he answered aloud. "How long does it take a woman to come to her senses?" Perhaps it was the brusqueness of his tone that made her turn and look out into the night for answer. He was in one of his cruel moods with

her to-night; because his own heart ached, he wanted her to suffer, too.

"How long will you be following wandering fires?" he persisted. "How long will you dream that you must fashion the world and all in it to your own models before you will consent to be a part of it?"

"I have answered you before, Herbert."

"But I didn't accept that answer."

"There is no other."

He leaned over and laid his hand heavily on the white arm that rested on the window-sill.

"Am I never to be the first consideration with you, Helen?" he asked.

"Why will you——" but she stopped short, and the last note in her voice made his answer hurried:

"Because you will not listen to reason; because you will not open your eyes to the truth. Because you will not see and understand that the bond which nature or God or fate has welded between us has not been and cannot be broken. Don't you feel, don't you know, Helen, that there is a connection between us that has obtained during all these months of supposed separation? Haven't we both thought and spoken and acted—lived—toward each other and for each other every moment of the time?"

"Have we?" she said brokenly. "I have tried to live for *him*. And, God help me, I will do so yet!" Girard's face took on its stern look again.

"The power that makes me love you, Helen, the

power that created you for my very own, impels me to win you at whatever cost, even to yourself. But there will be no struggle for you, when you allow yourself to see the truth—when you remember where your duty lies. No matter which one of us two—your father or myself—would be the better guide for you, Helen, according to your own convictions—your first duty is not to your father, but to me.” She turned and looked at him thoughtfully.

“My first duty is to *myself*.”

Girard never forgot the answer that she gave him that day. Helen also had reason to remember. She had not thought the matter out to that conclusion, and was as surprised as Girard himself at the answer that she gave him. Nevertheless, she had no sooner uttered it than the conviction that it carried seemed as old as Time to her, and to be as much a part of herself as if it had been born with her. There are convictions that lie so deep within us that we never recognize them until they suddenly force themselves to our lips.

“I don’t think I was made for you, Herbert”—for he had not attempted to answer her—“and I know I was not made for any other man. I think I was made for myself, to grow and develop into the highest that I can attain to according to the guidings of my own conscience—not anybody else’s—not even yours.”

Girard had been in a bad humor during all the interview, and was now distinctly vexed.

"And did you think, Helen, that I would deny you that right?"

"Why, no, not intentionally."

"Is there anything that a woman can be that is higher than a good wife and mother?" he asked.

"Yes, a good woman; the best and strongest that she knows how to be. That is first. You might as well say," she continued earnestly, "that a man is created for the sole purpose of being a good husband and father. Don't you see what that would be, reasoned out to the logical conclusion?"

If the door had suddenly opened and a new Helen had been ushered in, Girard could not have been more surprised. It was the first time during the years of their acquaintance that she had ever crossed intellectual swords with him; and that she should challenge him now on such high grounds, and hold her own so valiantly, was not calculated to sweeten his mood.

"Who taught you this?" he asked.

"Nobody. It is one of the things I have thought out for myself. Another is, that God has nowhere indicated that He holds a woman less responsible for the self He has given her than He does a man for the self He has given him, or that He ever excuses her own conscience from being her all-responsible guide."

"And old-maidhood is especially conducive to conscientiousness." There was an element of cruelty in him, and it pleased him now to sneer instead of to

argue, for he knew that she wanted to discuss the matter with him. The truth was, he disliked Helen's new ideas, and believed that the best way to overthrow them was to ignore or to ridicule them.

Helen tried to be calm, for she was very much in earnest.

"I know that you would not try to influence me," she continued, "but you would do it without trying. It frightens me now to think how blindly I have followed you; how I shall continue to follow you, even though my eyes have been opened, unless I hold to the strength to resist you. Knowing this, Herbert, it would be wrong for me to surrender to your influence."

"Yes, I am so many sorts of a devil it would be a pity to get mixed up with me," he answered mockingly. Helen tingled with indignation.

"That's the way you treat me, Herbert—the way you have always treated me. You have never wanted me to have an opinion that you didn't form for me; and whenever I express an idea of my own, you sweep it aside in a lordly fashion, or laugh at me, as you are doing now."

"I am not laughing," he said, a teasing smile in his gray eyes giving the lie to his words, "I am fearfully in earnest. Tell me the worst, Helen; do you want to vote?"

"You know I don't. And I am surprised at you. I thought it was only men given to using small weapons who kept that little pet sneer to fling at every

woman possessing an idea of her own. And I tell you now, I don't intend to be ridiculed in any such fashion. When you talk to me you have got to meet me openly and fairly, and pretend to respect what I say, whether you do or not."

Helen realized that she had descended from her first lofty position, and the knowledge made her more indignant than ever. She was possessed of a passionate temper, and, somehow, Girard could manage to rouse it more completely than anyone else.

"The second Declaration of American Independence!" he exclaimed, with mock enthusiasm. Helen's cheeks turned scarlet.

"You can be the cruelest thing in this world when you try," she answered him. They had unconsciously neared the door during their conversation, and Helen turned suddenly toward it to leave him, but Girard was before her in an instant, and put his hand on the door to keep it shut.

"One minute, little girl; I was only teasing you. Don't go like this."

"I am not a 'little girl,' and I will not be 'teased' like one, and have the things that are of the most serious import to me laughed aside and sneered at."

"I am sorry, Helen; I didn't mean to make you angry."

For answer, she signed to him imperiously to open the door.

Girard looked into her eyes for a moment with a sudden deep feeling in his own.

"Do you know what the matter is, Helen? You don't really love me. That is where all the trouble comes. You have never loved me—not for one single instant!"

"What right have you to say that?"

"You have given me every right to say it. What should you know of love—you who can stand coldly by and measure and weigh and consider, when a man's very soul is in the balance!"

"But I do love you, Herbert."

"Then come to me. Come!" he commanded.

She shrank from his appealing arms.

"No, no," she cried; "I cannot, I must not!" His arms dropped and his face became very grave.

"I don't blame you, child. You have been as mistaken as I have. I monopolized your young life before you had time to know your own heart. I have done you a cruel injustice. Do not make a mistake again, Helen. You will know the man of your real love by this unfailing sign: You will go to him when he needs you, without hesitation, without thought for any other."

He opened the door for her; and because she could not answer, she left him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A SONG AND ITS BURDEN

THE Thursday succeeding his adventure in St. Philip street was a dull, heavy day for Girard. A few clients came and went, but they were not troublesome to any degree, and were easily disposed of. The only thing that occurred to mar the peace of the lawyer's morning hours was an interview with a much-injured, tearful woman, who came to employ him to procure her a divorce from her husband. When his red-eyed client had closed the door behind her, Girard said to his stenographer, savagely:

"Miss Alice, I feel it borne in upon me that it's going to be my punishment in Hades to have to litigate exclusively for your charming sex. I give you my word, I would rather be hanged than to have business dealings with a woman."

For fully an hour after that, no one else appeared. The stenographer clicked away steadily at her machine, and Girard sat at a desk in the second office, working on a brief. When the first fifteen minutes had passed, he threw down his pen and leaned back in his chair with his feet up to luxuriate in a few minutes' idleness. The brief lay before him, finished.

The click of the types in the next room ceased, and there was a rattle of papers, then the tapping of a

pile of manuscript on the table to make the edges of the sheets take an even line. Miss Alice was putting the pages together. She was singing, evidently unconsciously, from the distinctness to which her voice had risen.

“Ah! Io rido in poter me stessa quì veder!
 Ah! Io rido in poter me stessa quì veder!
 Non sei tu? Margherita,
 Non sei tu? Dimmi su——”

floated in to him through the open door between them. At the sound, a speculative look crept into Girard's eyes; the fingers that he had been unconsciously drumming on the desk at his side, stopped still.

“Dimmi su, dimmi, dimmi di su presto!”

came again from the girl—the voice was clear, sweet, refined——

“Ah! s'egli quì fosse——”

Miss Alice ceased singing abruptly, for her employer appeared in the open door with the suddenness of a ghost.

“What's that you are singing?” he asked abruptly.

“That,” said the girl, crimsoning at the unexpected notice, “is ‘È strano poter il viso suo veder.’”

“Yes, but what is it in English, for pity's sake? Where did you learn it? What is it all about?”

“Why—why——” stammered the girl, rather taken aback, “it means ‘What joy past compare,

these jewels bright to wear!’ It is the jewel song from ‘Faust,’ the Italian version, you know. Do you understand music?” she asked, pleased at the thought of finding unexpected sympathy in the one passion of her colorless life.

“Well, no, I can’t say that I ‘understand’ it, but I know good music when I hear it.” And he honestly thought he did.

“What is your favorite song?”

“‘Old Black Joe,’ but I like this one you were singing, immensely. Won’t you go on with it? Why, you don’t mind *me*, do you?” laughing good-humoredly at her excessive embarrassment. “Well, recite me the words then, if you will. It seems to me that I have heard that song before, and I want to recall it. Say the part you were singing when I came in.”

Very much relieved at not having to sing, the girl began:

“Mirror, mirror, tell me truly——”

“Ah, not those—excuse me, please—the Italian words—the ones you were singing.”

“She knew them well, and she recited them with a feeling and a sweetness of accent that surprised him.

“Non sei tu? Margherita,
Non sei tu?
Dimmi su, dimmi su,
Dimmi, dimmi, di su presto!
Ah! s’egli qui fosse
Per così vedermi,
Come una damigella
Mi troverebbe bella!”

When the recitation ceased, Girard was walking briskly up and down the room.

"Miss Alice," he asked, with an unusual show of interest, "do many people know that song? Do girls learn it now?"

"Well, musical people know it—people who can appreciate that class of music."

He stopped before her and handed her one of the sheets of the paper that lay near.

"Won't you write me the name of it here, and the name of the composer?" The girl complied, saying as she did so:

"You will probably have to buy the score of the whole opera."

"Thank you," he replied, as she handed him the paper. "I think I'll have to raise your salary a little. I ought not to expect to get a musician, an elocutionist, and a stenographer, all for fifty dollars, ought I? We'll call it sixty in the future."

"I am so much obliged to you," answered the girl, glowing with gratitude. "Are you going to learn it?" she asked, to cover her embarrassed surprise.

"Oh, no, I can't sing. I'm going to take it to a little musical friend of mine and ask her to sing it for me." The girl could not imagine why he laughed softly as he went back to his desk in the other room.

After closing the door behind him, he sat alone in the more private office and stared out at the buildings across the street as if he had never seen them before. He did not see them then. Instead of their straight

ugliness of outline, his mind was beholding a street of irregular, picturesque houses, a certain echoing stairway which loomed big with suggestiveness, and a long, dirty arcade, lighted only by the fitful radiance of two wind-blown candles. He knew now that Zoe had tricked him. Yes, those were her very words—the words of that Italian song. The refrain had lingered in his sub-conscious memory ever since that night in St. Philip street. He had not been able to word it to himself, but it had remained with him, nevertheless, and he recognized it instantly as soon as he heard it again. What a piece of acting she had done! He remembered the sign of the cross that had so impressed him, and her greedy dive into the dirt for the money he had tossed her.

He turned over in his mind, again and again, every incident of that interview, and just as he congratulated himself that he had sounded all the depths concerning it, he suddenly remembered something that had hitherto escaped him. Zoe had not screamed when he caught her. She had not uttered a single sound during the interview but low, desperate pleadings that could scarcely have been heard many feet away. This should have impressed him at the time, and he wondered now that it had not done so. Properly noted and reflected on, it would have revealed the truth to him some time ago. They had been in a hazardous situation, a situation hazardous for both of them, and she had not dared to alarm the dwellers in St. Philip street. If she had really been the Italian he had

thought her, she would have cried out and summoned her people to her assistance.

It occurred to Girard that the most peculiar phase of the whole circumstance was that this girl, who did not know a syllable of Italian except the words of the songs she sang, who was as foreign as himself to the life of that quarter, could masquerade as one of its inhabitants, and go in and out of their haunts with apparent ease and safety.

Then he reflected that only this once, at least to his knowledge, had she attempted to disguise herself as an Italian; and that then she had been in a lonely place where there were but few to see, and at the hour of all the twenty-four when the streets are most deserted—the hour when the darkness gathers, and life turns indoors for the day's last meal.

But Girard knew the suspicious nature of these people too well to accept this explanation of the strange circumstance with any degree of alacrity. The only alternative, however, was that of believing that Zoe, in some utterly unaccountable way, had made friends in the Italian Quarter. Here again his knowledge of the suspiciousness of its inhabitants stood in his way, and he reverted reluctantly to his first theory.

It was an uncomfortable half-hour that the lawyer spent with his reflections, but he came out of it with two positive convictions with regard to the lawless girl who was puzzling him so—she was as sane as himself, and she had something to conceal. Zoe had been feigning madness for many weeks; that fact he

saw clearly at last, but had she succeeded in deceiving the detective, too?

Zoe had something to conceal—but what? and from whom? From himself, evidently—but the detective? Girard remembered the time when she startled him with the statement that Mr. Treadwell was in New Orleans ten minutes after he had received a telegram from the detective announcing his departure from Chicago for New York. He had thought her mad then; he knew better now. Plainly the girl had either concocted the whole story and surprised him with it for reasons best known to herself, or else she was deceiving Treadwell, too.

A knock at the door startled him back to his surroundings. In answer to a lusty “Come in” from him, the door opened and a sun-burned man, in coarse clothes and a broad-brimmed hat, entered.

“Walk in, Dawson. I was just wondering a while ago if you would get my note in time to come to-day.”

“Yes, I got your note all right; but I was coming to-day, anyhow, to see what makes Hopkins so all-fired slow about coming out to put up the new sugar-screw. He promised me a week ago, but I’ve not seen hair nor hide of him.”

“Oh, well, Dawson, Hopkins is one of your good Christians, and he has eternity ahead of him. You needn’t expect him to hustle like I do. Give the job to another man.”

“And maybe not get as good work as Hopkins would give us, sir.”

"Hang it! There's more than one good machinist in New Orleans. Have the screw put up and tested, and see that it is right. When that is done, give your man an order on me for his money."

"All right, sir."

"Did you close down on Leeson?"

"No—sir—you see——"

"No, I don't see."

"Why, sir, I don't think you have much to complain of, usually. The fact of the business is that Leeson's wife flew to Miss Lawrence, and put up a pitiful tale to her, and Miss Lawrence forthwith wrote me not to move in the matter till I'd seen you. She said she'd make it all right with you."

"Which Miss Lawrence?"

"Miss Helen."

Girard looked decidedly black-browed for some moments, then he said, "Well, just let that matter stand awhile, and I'll see about it. How is your white help panning out?"

"All right, I reckon." Dawson gave a swift glance upward, then dropped his eyes again. "Yes—he'll do," he added.

"Has it ever struck you that there is anything peculiar about him?" asked the lawyer.

"Why, no, sir. What makes you ask?" answered the other, bringing his usually shifting glance to a dead pause.

"I don't know that I have any good reason for asking, but he, somehow, interests me. Has he any

friends here in town? Have you ever seen him in company with any stranger?"

"I can't say as to the first, sir, and 'no' to the second. He's mighty quietlike, and don't seem to want company. Is there anything suspicious about him, sir?"

"That's what I can't say. Dawson, Mr. Lawrence always said you could be trusted implicitly—I want you to do a delicate piece of work for me, personally."

"Well, sir?"

"Watch that man, Freeman. Learn especially if he has any associates in town, and who they are, if you possibly can. I said it was personal, but it is not. It may, just possibly, have some connection with this affair about Mr. Lawrence."

"Then, of course, sir, I'll do it; but how?"

"Just keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouth shut. I am very probably doing the man an injustice in harboring such a suspicion of him, and I wouldn't like to injure him, of course; so be absolutely silent about this, except to me, now will you?"

Dawson promised.

Ten minutes later, when the farmer stood in the street below, he gazed up at the windows of Girard's office, and said slowly and incisively:

"Yes, I'll watch—more than one!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THEORY AND PRACTICE

IN spite of his determination to keep away from Helen, Girard found himself back at her home that very evening, though he despised himself for going. The family, with the addition of Mrs. Fitzpatrick and her newly married daughter, were gathered on the front veranda, and were deep in conversation when he arrived. He hoped that Helen would ask him into the drawing-room after he had dutifully shaken hands with the others; but Helen, with a hard-heartedness that he would not have expected, even from her, seated him in the center of the group close beside her Aunt Susan.

Girard was too intensely masculine not to be also intensely selfish in social matters. He hated "crowds" with his whole soul, and he had a way of shutting up like a clam whenever forced by circumstances to make one of an uncongenial gathering. This bearishness of his had always been a thorn in Helen's side, and she had often tried to reason or coax him out of it, but to no effect. To-night she had evidently turned him over to fate, and he mentally assured himself that he would not have been happy with her, anyway.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick, with her sweet, placid face and her crown of silver hair, sat to his left; Zoe was directly in front of him; and Helen was some distance away, on a settee. Only Frank was missing from the group. Girard was just wishing he had not been weak enough to come, when Zoe unified the assemblage with the explanation:

"You broke up a spirited discussion on the subject of 'men,' Herbert; you've no idea what you have been missing."

"Pray don't let me interrupt you, ladies; I have always wanted to get a bird's-eye view of my own sex," he replied.

"A bird's-eye view is from the viewpoint of creatures with wings, isn't it?" came in Helen's voice from the shadows.

"You have said it," he answered. Then he turned to Zoe. "Please don't let me be an ornament merely—can't you use me in some way?"

"Why, of course," replied the girl promptly. "Mrs. Fitzpatrick, we'll take him for a frightful example——"

"You, Zoe!" broke in Miss Susan. "We were just explaining to these girls, Mr. Girard, that they must not expect to have any influence over the men they marry after they are actually married to them——"

"Am I to understand," put in Girard politely, as Miss Susan paused to scold Cyrus, "that your friend here shares your opinion? They tell downtown that

Mr. Fitzpatrick hasn't made an after-dinner speech in ten years without alluding to the fact that his wife manages him." Bessie Fitzpatrick Wilkinson laughed outright, and the lady whose husband said she managed him smiled sadly. It was Miss Susan who answered him:

"Joseph Fitzpatrick has told that so often that he actually believes it himself. Now, I was only telling Bessie here that she ought to take a stand against Gilbert Wilkinson at the very first——"

"And 'teach him his place,'" interpolated Zoe.

"I didn't say it that way, Zoe."

"And mother had just confided to Miss Susan," said the young wife, while she had the opportunity, "that I was making the fatal mistake of being truthful with Mr. Wilkinson."

"I didn't say it that way, Bessie." They all laughed, and Miss Susan hastened to the rescue of her friend:

"It is no such thing, miss; your mother only said that, on account of their different way of looking at things, it was never safe to be perfectly frank with men."

"And they both agreed," said Helen, from the shadows, "that the less a woman knows, except about household affairs, the higher she rises in a man's esteem. Mrs. Fitzpatrick said that all the sense a married woman needs is just enough to keep out of the fire—and she 'said it that way.'"

"Yes," chimed in Bessie, with suppressed laughter

in her voice, "and Miss Susan declared that the only way to get along with men was for them to be gone from morning till night—that the house was really no place for them."

"And that they always got so in the way on Sundays," Zoe prompted.

"You girls are perfectly outrageous," snapped Miss Susan. "We were only answering some of Helen's nonsensical ideas, Mr. Girard."

"I am afraid I can't appreciate your arguments fully," put in the listener, "unless you tell me what the 'nonsensical ideas' were that prompted your answers."

"Oh, do pray let's stop this discussion; we have worn it threadbare," came from the shadows.

"Why, Helen, you are awfully impolite!" It was Zoe this time. "Mr. Girard just asked auntie a question—tell him, auntie."

"Yes, do," he warmly seconded. Miss Susan did not need to be urged.

"Oh, Helen has all sorts of Utopian ideas, especially about marriage. She has taken it into her head that a woman ought to read and study and think, so she can be what she calls a 'good comrade' to the man she marries; and that there ought not to be any point where their paths separate. Then it was we tried to convince her that the last thing in the world a man wanted was a woman with an idea in her head——"

"And that was when both of you cautioned us,"

interrupted Zoe, "never, under any circumstances, to talk sense to a man."

Girard sat absolutely still, and Miss Susan continued:

"Then Helen went to work to prove to us that it is a bad plan for husbands and wives to be separated so much, and to have such different interests, ending poetically, if not convincingly, that the more a woman loves a man the more she wants to be with him."

"And what did you and Mrs. Fitzpatrick say to that?" he asked. Helen answered him without waiting for her aunt to speak.

"They assured me—I mean they convinced me—that the only way to get along with a man is to get along without him."

"Now, play fair, old girl," exclaimed Zoe. "All they urged was the keeping of them out of the house—except on Sundays." Girard rose to go.

"I am very sorry, ladies," he said, "that an engagement for ten o'clock takes me away from this instructive conclave. I assure you I have learned things this evening that never were dreamt of in my philosophy." He turned to Bessie with a laugh. "Before I go, however, I should like to know how all this theoretical and practical wisdom on the subject of managing men is going to affect the future of my friend Wilkinson."

"I'm going to 'teach him his place' as soon as I can find out where that is," laughed Bessie.

"Block him out in the backyard, Bess?" suggested

Zoe, and she rose and entered the hall with Girard, ostensibly to help find his hat.

"I am dying of curiosity to know what you have in that bundle," she said, surveying critically a small cylindrical roll he had held in his hand all during his visit. "You looked as if you were afraid to lay it down."

"I was."

"Please tell me what's in it."

"'Layovers to catch meddlers.'"

"Never mind—but if it hadn't been for me you never would have known what Helen's 'ideas' about marriage are."

"Here, take it!" he exclaimed; "I brought it to you, anyway." Zoe tore the wrapping-paper off, and unrolled a piece of sheet music. When her eyes fell on the title, she looked up at Girard with a violent start. For once he had caught her off guard.

"I thought," he said, looking at her keenly, "that you might like to learn it. A little friend of mine recited the words to me lately, and they struck me as being a—a—perplexing."

Zoe raised her head and looked at him with the devil's own daring in her eyes.

"It was awfully sweet of you to bring it to me," she answered, "but I know it already—by heart." He lowered his voice so that it could not reach the group outside.

"I shall never trust you again," he said.

"You never have trusted me."

“You have been playing a part with me.”

“A blind man ought to have seen that.”

“And you have something to hide from me.” The girl had not lowered her lids—not even momentarily.

“I challenge you to prove it,” she answered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

COMPLICATIONS

WHEN Girard returned to his office from dinner the next day, whom should he find comfortably tilted back in his own office chair but the detective, Treadwell. To say that he was glad to see this man of silence was not to overstate his feelings, but the gladness that he felt had certainly no degree of personal warmth in it. For some reason which he could not then fathom, the lawyer disliked the man before him.

"Why didn't you wait a year or two longer?" he asked after his first exclamation of surprise. "It's a pity to have to hurry back like this." Treadwell laughed.

"That means you've missed me, eh?"

"I most assuredly have."

"Know anything?" asked the detective pleasantly.

"Well, that is just what I was going to ask you," replied the other.

"Oh, I never do, you know."

"What about that clue you wrote me you had?"

"Wrong trail. We're up against a puzzler." Girard did not believe this, but he knew it was useless to take issue with him. After a few moments' silence

the lawyer turned about so as to face his visitor directly.

"Treadwell," he said resolutely, "we have played this game of battledore and shuttlecock long enough. What have you done about that girl?"

"What girl?"

Girard was provoked, but he kept his temper. He knew very well that Treadwell had understood the reference perfectly.

"Mr. Lawrence's adopted daughter," he answered, with outward calm.

"Why, nothing, as yet, directly. I was waiting for you to help me get on the inside of the affair. I knew you'd come to your senses about it sooner or later."

"Where are those photographs you got out of the old gentleman's desk?" Girard had expected the detective to show some surprise or displeasure when he mentioned this to him, but he was disappointed. Treadwell might have received the pictures from the lawyer himself for all the emotion he showed at mention of them.

"They are around at my place. Want 'em?" he answered carelessly.

"What did you do with them?"

"Not a damned thing but look at 'em."

"Were you looking for a likeness in her to the family? Did you find any?" asked Girard.

"Why, yes, to the first. Can't decide about the other; but families are like questions, you know, there

are two sides to them. Suppose you drop around at my quarters some night, and let's compare them together." The easy friendliness of his manner was hard to resist, but Girard was determined.

"Look here, Treadwell; of course I am not fool enough to insist that you confide to me your methods and plan in this business, but there are several questions I must have answered if you are to remain in my employ: Do you believe that this girl is Mr. Lawrence's illegitimate child?"

"I suspect it."

"What do you suspect about the mother?"

"Mixed breed."

Girard shrank inwardly at the man's brutal frankness, but he had expected the substance of the answer.

"Had her people anything to do with the old man's murder?"

"They committed it."

"You believe he was murdered, then?"

"No doubt of it. He was dead before they missed him."

"If you get your hands on the right men, will their trial develop this scandal?"

"Why, yes."

"And you believe Mr. Lawrence to be dead?"

"I know it."

Girard brought his fist down on the desk.

"Then stop this damned business right here!" he exclaimed.

"I'll not do it," said the detective quietly.

When Girard was roused he had a way of turning blue-white to his temples. The detective watched his pale face now as if he had no connection with the man's rage.

"And what do you mean by that?" demanded the lawyer, with strong repression. "Are you not my employe?"

"I am the employe of young Lawrence, through you, as his agent. I am morally responsible to him. You can stop my pay, of course, but neither you, nor Lawrence, nor anybody else can stop me from investigating a crime against the State if I choose to do so on my own hook."

In spite of his deep anger, Girard was too clear-headed not to see that the other man had the advantage of him.

"That is the business view of your case," he said, still keeping command of his voice, "but there is another aspect that you miss altogether. I am a friend, and, in a sense, the protector of those two young ladies. I am that by virtue of my own feelings toward them, and by virtue of Mr. Lawrence's trust in me. You have been using, and I understand purpose to continue using, one of them as a tool in your investigation, and that, too, in a most objectionable way. The law to fit a case like that is to be found in the practice of gentlemen. I shall hold you responsible to me, as man to man. Have no more communication with Miss Zoe Lawrence. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly," said the detective, with such ready acquiescence, such unruffled calm, that much of the lawyer's anger was swallowed up in sheer amazement, "and I like your grit. Now let's examine a *leetle* further into these 'gentlemen's practices' you are talking about, and see if we are not both in danger of forgetting some. It strikes me that we are taking too little thought in this matter of old Lawrence's son. He's young, but he's a man, and the man most vitally concerned. Now, according to the 'practices of gentlemen,' ain't it unfair to him to leave him out of this settlement between us?"

Girard's sense of justice was acute. When he spoke again, his tone showed that he was prepared to meet his opponent on the solid ground of reason which the latter had so wisely chosen.

"You are right," he replied. "I have felt all along that the fair, the just way, was to lay the matter before him. If Frank Lawrence had been of a different temperament, I should, long since, have told him all that was puzzling me, but I wanted to come to a more distinct understanding of your suspicions, and to make sure of the necessity before putting this strain on him. The truth is, I fear for the fellow's sanity. That's the thing in a nutshell. You see, I know him and his training. To begin with, he has a woman's valuation of chastity; then his pride, especially his pride of family, is almost a mania with him; lastly, he loved his father with a reverence that amounted to worship, and he loves that girl with the love of a

man for a woman. Think what it will mean to him to hear what we have to say to him,—to have to decide this thing. I tell you, I don't believe his mind will bear the strain of it. You, yourself, have already noticed and remarked on the effect of this trouble on him."

The two men were quiet for a minute—the lawyer folding and unfolding a paper that he held in his hand—the detective, perfectly relaxed and still. At length the latter spoke.

"Yes, that's the danger," he said deliberately, "but those are my terms of compromise."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will agree to abide by Lawrence's decision, if you will go with me and lay the whole matter before him. That's a pretty stiff concession for me, Mr. Girard, and I hope you appreciate it. You see I could keep on with this thing, if I chose to do so, even if the whole lot of you opposed it. I might come out of it with something of a reputation, too. But I'll stake the whole thing on Lawrence's decision, if you will, too."

Nothing could have been fairer than this proposition, and the lawyer appreciated the fact. It was a great relief to him, also, in a twofold way. The fact that the unsavory investigation had been allowed to go forward to its present critical point, without the consent of the man most deeply affected, had been very much against his sense of fair play. Now, whatever the cost, it would be a relief to feel that Frank was no longer

in the dark concerning the direction the inquiry was taking. Then, too, he had recognized the fact that the detective could continue the investigation to the end, if he chose to do so; and it was a relief to be able to come to terms with him.

"That's fair and square," he said, after a little, "but there is one reservation I want to make. It is entirely in your favor, but I want to make it, nevertheless. There must be no mention to Lawrence of the suspected dark strain in his adopted sister. Do you agree to that?"

"Can't see any reason against it, from my point of the case—but yours?"

"He suspects that part of it already, and he would not tolerate a reference to it from an archangel. If we want to keep him in a mood to be reasoned with, we must avoid that part of the subject," answered the lawyer.

"Enough said," agreed the detective, "when shall we put the case before him? To-night?"

"Yes, the sooner the better," answered the other. "I'll telephone him to meet us at his house at half-past eight."

At eight-thirty that evening, the two men, coming from opposite directions, met at Mr. Lawrence's gate. Treadwell laughed.

"I wonder if our young friend is as good a time-piece as you are," he said.

Frank Lawrence, himself, answered their knock, and ushered them in, closing the door behind them before

taking his seat. There had been no agreement between Girard and the detective as to which one should lay the case before the young man, and there now ensued an awkward silence. Girard had told Frank that they wanted to see him on important business, so the young fellow naturally looked to him for an explanation.

"Well, what is it?" he asked of Girard.

With a glance at the detective, who was looking as blandly impassive as if they had met for a game of cards, Girard opened the subject:

"It is a most distressing business all the way round, Frank, but, nevertheless, Mr. Treadwell and I have agreed to lay it before you."

"Yes," said the young fellow, looking at him intently, and the lawyer proceeded:

"Mr. Treadwell, here, suspects some sort of connection between the loss of your father and the fact of Miss Zoe's adoption into your family"—the deep blue of Frank's eyes suddenly turned black; he leaned forward slightly—"in fact," continued Girard, lamely, "he believes that persons closely connected with the other side of her history murdered your father because of an old grudge."

"What old grudge?" asked the young man. Girard paused perceptibly, then answered:

"Mr. Treadwell thinks that Miss Zoe is your father's natural child, and probably so in violation of some already established bond."

The young man's features suddenly hardened.

"You don't know my father," he answered, after a pause.

"Frank——" Girard began an attempt to relieve the discomfort of the situation, but Mr. Treadwell was already saying suavely:

"Of course, of course. It's all conjecture, as yet, Mr. Lawrence; but we thought you ought to know."

"The gist of the situation is," put in the lawyer, "that Mr. Treadwell and I have disagreed on the main point and we want you to settle it. Believing as he does, he wants your permission to go as deeply into the matter of your adopted sister's history as he can, and he wants all the information on the subject that your father's papers may afford." He looked a warning into the eyes of the young man, and continued, "Now I opposed, and still oppose, this plan decidedly. If your father is dead, as Mr. Treadwell and everybody else believes, it would profit you nothing to bring his murderers to justice at the cost of a family scandal."

"*If your father is dead.*" The detective spoke quietly, but both the other men started and looked at him.

"You said you believed it," exclaimed Girard, astounded at the man's duplicity.

"Do you believe it?" demanded Frank.

"Sometimes," answered the detective, deliberately, "and sometimes not. He may be as live as you or me, and right here in this city to-night. But I hope, for his sake, that he ain't."

Frank Lawrence sprang to his feet and almost staggered down the room.

Girard could have choked the detective for the covert advantage he had taken, but he did not speak for some time. He was thinking. He knew only too well the agony of spirit in which Frank walked the floor at the far end of the room. At length he rose and went to him.

"Frank," he said, purposely loud enough for the detective to hear, "I would not consider that side of it for one instant. I would not!" Frank stopped in front of him.

"Girard," he answered, huskily, "there has not been a moment in all these months in which I would not have given my life to know that he lived,—now—now I would barter my soul's chances to know him dead."

"We can easily prove the one or the other, Mr. Lawrence." It was Treadwell's quiet, passionless voice, and he was close at the lawyer's elbow. "We can settle the matter with your co-operation," he concluded.

The lawyer turned on him a look of indignation and disgust, then both men looked again at the man they were rending between them. Girard, who had feared so deeply for the supersensitive, highstrung fellow, expected now a complete breakdown; but his young friend calmed and straightened at the crisis. The mantle of heroic manhood had descended upon him.

"With your co-operation," insinuated the detective,

again. Girard gave him a look that ought to have silenced him.

"Frank—your sister!" he urged.

"Your *father*, Mr. Lawrence," said the detective.

There was a long, long silence, and then Frank Lawrence answered, with an unnatural calm:

"I think I have some papers that will help you, Mr. Treadwell, in my father's desk." He turned from them and opened the sliding doors that led into the back drawing-room. The two others followed him.

When they crossed the second room, Frank paused, for a moment only, with his hand on the door of his father's study; then he turned the knob and the three men entered the quiet, unused room together. Frank took a bunch of keys from his pocket and fitted a small one to the lock of his father's desk. The unsteadiness of his hand made futile his attempts to unfasten it, and after he had tried several times, Girard put his hand on his arm.

"Let me do it, Frank," he said, "I have had more experience with it than you." The younger man withdrew his hand; and the lawyer, by inclining the key a little to one side as he turned it, caused the bolt to slip back easily. He lowered the top of the desk, disclosing the pigeon-holes inside, and stepped back. The detective was on the other side of young Lawrence, a little in the background. His eyes were on the lawyer.

Without pausing again, Frank hastily drew the inside drawer entirely out of the socket and ran his

hand into the aperture left vacant by it. The men who were watching him saw his face change suddenly. He forced his hand still farther in, and felt again. The next moment he withdrew it, empty, and knelt down before the desk, peering into the opening he had been exploring.

"It's not here!" he said, at length, looking at them in consternation.

"It must be," persisted Girard, "perhaps it has slipped still farther down. Let's take out the contents of these other compartments, and see."

He and Frank instantly acted on the suggestion, and in a few moments had the entire contents of the desk removed and laid on a table near by. When this was done, the bare, solid back of the desk was visible through each pigeon-hole, but the packet they were seeking was not to be seen. The two searchers turned quickly to the table and went over the papers there, again, and more carefully. The detective stood by with his hands in his pockets, and offered no assistance. During the second examination of the papers, the three men stood facing each other around the table. When the quest was finished, and unsuccessfully, they looked at each other across the disorderly pile of papers. There was blank amazement on the faces of two of the group, and nothing on the face of the other.

"Do you suppose it has been stolen?" asked young Lawrence of the detective.

"Evidently," answered the man addressed.

"Frank," said the lawyer, suddenly remembering the case of jewelry that had been left in the drawer, "your mother's diamonds are gone, too."

Frank hastily examined the contents of the drawer, and found to his dismay that his friend was right.

"I see you carry the desk key in your pocket," broke in Treadwell, "and that it is of an unusual pattern"—he was examining the key as he spoke—"the question is, 'Who has had access to the desk lately?'"

"Why—why"—Frank's face was clouding with mystification—"you, when you came here before breakfast this morning, and Mr. Girard, here, and myself are all that I know of."

"You were with me this morning, Mr. Lawrence," said the detective.

"And I have not——" Girard was beginning to say, when the young fellow interrupted him sharply.

"*Gentlemen!*" he exclaimed, in proud reproof.

"You haven't told me yet just what the papers were," said the detective, deliberately.

"They were about my adopted sister," said young Lawrence, in an unsteady tone. Then he described, at length, the circumstance of Girard's finding the packet, and repeated the subsequent conversation between the lawyer and himself in regard to it—omitting nothing except the part relating to Zoe's parentage.

The detective then asked a number of questions which elicited a repetition in detail of the main facts

of the case—among them, the circumstance that young Lawrence and the lawyer had together seen the package behind the inner drawer on the morning of the eleventh, and had left it there; and that Frank had, from that moment, carried the desk-key in his pocket.

Having concluded his exhaustive questioning, Mr. Treadwell took a seat and rubbed his fat palms together slowly.

“Mr. Lawrence,” he said, reflectively, “there’s one little point we are about to neglect. It seems to me that the next questions are, ‘Who do these papers really belong to? Who would have the deepest interest in their contents? And has the best moral right to their possession?’”

“The one in reference to whom they were written,” answered the young man, with the expression in his eyes of having been waked suddenly.

“Exactly,” said the detective.

“Well?” asked young Lawrence, feverishly.

“Well,” echoed the man of secrecy, “maybe she knows about them, and has put them away in what she considers a safer place. I’d call her in and ask her.”

It was Girard’s time to stand off and observe, and be self-satisfied. He had experienced a feeling of relief when the papers proved to be missing, and he was now secretly elated. That Zoe had abstracted them from the desk and had them then in her possession, he was absolutely certain; that Treadwell and Frank would never get from her one syllable of the

truth about them, he would have wagered all he possessed.

"I'll go and speak to Zoe about it," said Frank, in answer to Mr. Treadwell's suggestion.

"Maybe she put them somewhere else in the desk—in some of these drawers below here," the detective ventured. "Why not send for her, and get her to show us? It'll save time, you know."

"It's not necessary to trouble her to come downstairs," answered the young fellow, "I can ask her all that," and he went out and closed the door behind him. Girard had taken his seat on the side of the heavy table, and was now smiling significantly at the other man.

"I knew he was not going to let you put the thumb-screws on her," he said, exultingly. The detective chuckled.

"I lose out once in a while," he admitted.

"That was an infernally mean advantage you took of me," said the lawyer. "You know Mr. Lawrence is dead."

"'Know,'" quoted Treadwell, "I don't 'know' what my own name is. No man does."

The two men then fell to examining the desk together, and were still engaged in the task when Frank Lawrence re-entered.

"It's the most remarkable thing I ever heard of," he exclaimed, coming forward quickly, "neither of the girls knew that it was there at all—much less has any idea what could have become of it. Zoe is

wild to get it, and is anxious for you"—he was looking directly at Mr. Treadwell—"to do all in your power to recover it."

That seemed the natural end of the interview, so both men rose to depart. The three passed out into the hall, still intently discussing the long-debated question, when suddenly Girard thought he heard a slight, meaning cough. As he passed the portiere—the last of the three—he felt a quick pull at his sleeve. He turned and stepped back behind the curtain to be confronted by Zoe.

"Frank wouldn't let me come down," she whispered, hurriedly; "he says Mr. Treadwell is not a gentleman. Do please, please find them for me. I want them worse than anything!"

"Well, give me the key to your trunk"—then his voice changed to the serious—"I am your friend, Zoe. Don't give up those papers until you have read them—it is your right." He left her protesting, and hurried out to the front steps to join the others.

"I'll see you again about this, Mr. Treadwell," Frank was saying, "and you, too, Girard," he added with quick courtesy as the lawyer joined them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE ROBBERY

ON the second morning after it was found that the papers and jewelry were missing from Mr. Lawrence's desk, the family were thrown into excitement again by the discovery that another robbery had been committed.

Helen's watch and diamond pin were gone from the case in which she remembered to have placed them the night before. Three valuable rings had been taken from Zoe's dressing-table, and cash to the amount of seventy-three dollars from Frank's pocket.

Zoe was the first to discover that a burglary had been committed and immediately alarmed the others, whereupon the extent of the theft was quickly brought to light.

As soon as Frank was shaken out of his morning nap and apprised of the loss, he hurried into his clothes and telephoned for the police. Then he made a tour of inspection, piloted by the two girls who had already been over the ground together. They found everything as secure as it had been left on the preceding night, except one window in Mr. Lawrence's private study. This was unfastened and partially open. Clearly, whoever the thief was, he had entered and

gone out that way. The blind showed no signs of having been pried open, however; the latches were intact, and the slats unbroken. When Helen suggested that the window must have been left open through carelessness, Frank assured her that he, himself, had taken care to see that it was securely fastened on the night before.

A policeman and a police detective were sent up to examine the premises, and they at once attached importance to a circumstance which the amateurs had failed to note fully. There were no tracks beneath the open window. Frank had noticed this, but had thought that the grass at that point was probably too thick to allow the earth to receive impressions of footprints. The officers, however, called attention to the fact that the window was some ten feet above the lawn, and the ground soft from a recent rain, and that anyone springing, or even dropping, that distance would, perforce, leave the imprint of his feet on the spongy turf. In proof of this, one of them dropped from the window, and showed to the other men following his example that their tracks, though light, were still quite perceptible.

"If your burglar passed in or out this way, he must have had on snow-shoes," said he.

In spite of the officer's skepticism, the open window in the study was proved to be the only one through which anyone could have entered.

While the men were going over the outside premises, and examining the fastenings, Helen and Zoe

made a quick tour of the house to see if anything had been stolen that had not been missed at first. To their great relief, they found everything else intact, even the silver in the dining-room. On hearing this from them, the detective suggested that they examine their trunks also. Helen took panic at once, for all that she valued most was stored away in an old trunk in her own apartments. Without waiting for further suggestion, she hurried to her dressing-room, and, seizing a bunch of keys from a hook, dropped down before her trunk of heirlooms. A minute sufficed for unstrapping and unlocking it, and she was soon in the depths of its contents. She felt her heart lighten as she noted that each article was in its place. Down at the bottom, at the left-hand front corner, she kept the box which contained all she had ever possessed of jewelry, except the watch and pin that had been stolen and the rings that never left her fingers.

Tumbling the old laces and silks aside, she reached down to the depths of the trunk and brought out in triumph, the ebony box. It was still locked. She hurriedly singled out the tiniest key on the ring and thrust it into the keyhole; then she threw back the lid.

The box was empty.

All the pretty things that her father had given her, all that her dead mother had left her, except the set already stolen—even the jeweled knee-buckles of her Cavalier great-grandfather—were gone. But something else was gone that was dearer by far—a little

emerald ring that was Herbert's first present to her. It had been bought with the first money he earned at his profession, and he had given it to her on her twelfth birthday when he was nothing more to her than the young friend of her father. Her finger had long since outgrown the tiny circlet, but she had kept it here to love in secret.

Helen laid her face on her arms and burst into tears. As for Zoe—the thieves had left her nothing of value. Her loss was not nearly so great as Helen's, for the latter had, of course, fallen heir to the family relics. Nevertheless, Zoe was inconsolable, for every jewel that she possessed was some birthday or Christmas gift, and nearly all had been given her by her adopted father.

Examination disclosed that, with these exceptions, and the money from Frank's pocket, nothing had been taken from the house, and there was much in it of value that was easily portable.

When the investigation was ended, all the searchers, with the exception of the servants, who were sent about their work that they might be out of hearing, gathered on the front gallery to decide what was to be done. It did not need the detective's opinion to convince any one of them that the burglar not only knew the premises, but knew also the habits of the family. As none of the servants slept in the house except the maid, Sallie, and as none but Sallie knew the whereabouts of the young ladies' belongings, it was decided at once that she be put under arrest. To

this Helen was inclined to object, but Zoe reminded her that it was probably the only way of recovering their lost property, so she reluctantly consented.

Sallie's room, over the kitchen, had already been searched with the rest of the house, but no clue had been found.

Helen was deeply troubled. If she could only have assured these men—if she could only have assured herself—that Sallie had been honest in the past, no amount of persuasion could have made her consent to the poor girl's arrest; but she knew too well that Sallie's fingers were as light as her heart, and that it was the girl's wont to help herself to everything she thought too small or too insignificant to be missed. In the light of these former offenses, Helen felt that she had no right to interfere in Sallie's behalf; so it came about that the enraged and terrified maid shortly found herself safely ensconced behind the bars of the city jail.

Though the matter of the robbery had been turned over to the city police for solving, Frank was anxious to get Mr. Treadwell's opinion concerning it; and for that purpose betook himself to the detective's office, several hours after the fact of the robbery had come to light.

He found Herbert Girard there before him, and the three men discussed the matter at length.

Treadwell agreed with the decision of the police, that the burglary was the work of someone entirely familiar with the domestic arrangements of the Law-

rence household. He added also that the valuables described as having been in a box at the bottom of a trunk, and under two unbroken locks, had very probably been stolen at some time previous, and that the thief evidently knew where Miss Lawrence kept her keys.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

EXECUTOR WITHOUT BOND

WHEN the lawyer took up his mail one morning several days later, his eye was at once caught by the appearance of one envelope in particular. It was a square of fine linen, and was addressed in a feminine hand. He at once laid down his other letters and broke the seal of this, for he somehow suspected it to be from Zoe.

"Please come up to see me this afternoon at five o'clock. Auntie and Helen will be out. Don't come too early, and don't fail to come. I am very, very anxious to see you by yourself. Yours, Zoe Lawrence," was all it said.

Girard had become so intensely interested in this strange girl, in spite of his distrust of her, and he was so hopelessly bewildered by the maze of circumstances with which she was connected, that he did not hesitate to break an important business engagement for that afternoon in order to respond to Zoe's urgent summons.

Six months before he would have let her anxiety await his business convenience; now, he had not power to resist when she beckoned. He tried not to know that, in spite of him, she was somehow getting

the better of him in a struggle too subtle for his comprehending.

Ever since he had first suspected the presence of negro blood in her veins he had instinctively looked down on her. At first, pity for her supposed mental derangement had led him to deal leniently with her in his thoughts, and to excuse to himself her moral shortcomings; since his last interview with her, however, he had not spared her. She was utterly untrustworthy—so he told himself—and he despised her cunning and trickery with all the strength of his own blunt honesty. That he was secretly glad to believe she was right then in possession of the papers which were missing from Mr. Lawrence's desk, did not make her act of abstracting them anything but dishonest in his eyes.

There was one suspicion, however, which he promptly silenced whenever it stole up to whisper in his ear—the thought that the girl was, in some way, connected with the disappearance of her own and Helen's jewelry. Girard was a man who tried to be perfectly fair in his estimate of other people. He knew that it was unjust to suspect Zoe of stealing things which had merely a money value, because she had abstracted the papers which related to herself, and which probably contained information that she would have died to conceal. Equally was it unfair to suspect her of such an act because she chose to deceive him and others as to her own part in the search for Mr. Lawrence, or because she could not be depended

on to tell the truth. So, whenever the idea connecting her with the robbery threatened to displace his sense of fair play, he at once put it from him.

The more Girard pondered the strange characteristics of Mr. Lawrence's adopted daughter, the more puzzled he became as to what her ultimate place in the world would be. It seemed to him that the fate that had thrown such a being into the midst of such a family, was almost human in its devilishness. He looked for no Providence in it, and found none. He saw in it, only fate, and sought in vain for a solution of the perplexity.

When the hour of five came, he was already in the Lawrence drawing-room—anxious, expectant. In a very few minutes Zoe entered. He noticed now, for the first time, that she was looking thin and worn, and that the shadows under her eyes had deepened. This afternoon, the brilliant, bewitching scarlet of her lips had fled, and had left her mouth drawn and pathetic. When Girard rose to meet her, he was unaccountably chilled by the greeting she gave him. He had expected her to be captious and spiteful—instead, she was coldly reserved.

"What is the matter now?" he demanded, in a tone that revealed all too plainly his impatience with her. Zoe had taken her seat on the sofa and was regarding him thoughtfully. As he spoke a subtle change crept into the gaze that she leveled on him.

"Nothing," she said, promptly.

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing."

"Well, young lady, I wish I had known that. You may have lost me a good fee by your foolishness. Did you send for me because you were hungering for my society?"

The pathetic little figure that had entered a few minutes before became suddenly transformed. Zoe kindled like a live coal before a fan—fire sprang to her eyes and to her lips. Without changing her position in the least, every little turn of languorous attitude suddenly became eloquent of defiance.

"Yes," she answered, incisively.

Girard was thoroughly provoked.

"Look here, Zoe, you've played this part long enough. Because you know I am vitally interested in this affair about Mr. Lawrence, you presume to set at naught my time and business obligations. The next time you send me an imperative summons, I wish you would please regard my interests a little, too."

"This is the last summons I'll ever send you. It is the last one I'll ever need to send you, and it was in your interest, solely."

"Oh, don't juggle with me, Zoe, you know how it provokes me. I hate to be cross with you, child, but you are unbearably trying when you take the notion to be. Now what are you driving at?"

The scarlet lips tightened stubbornly. Girard looked at her steadily, a few moments, and then rose and picked up his hat. He started to leave the room,

abruptly, but he turned at the door and came back to her side.

"If you ever really need me, Zoe, you may send for me, and I will come." Then he turned again to the door.

A quick rustle of skirts stayed the hand that he had laid on the knob, and in spite of himself he wheeled and faced her. She was half on her knees on the big sofa, and was leaning toward him over the heavy, scroll-like arm with the very devil in her eyes.

"You little—witch!" he exclaimed. "What is it that you know?"

"I know"—and her voice changed alarmingly—"I know—who killed him!"

"Who?" asked Girard, suddenly paling.

The girl walked straight up to him and looked him in the eyes.

"'Who?' Who but the only man in whose way he stood? Who but his 'executor without bond'?"

If the man before her had been suddenly stricken dumb, he could not have been more silent. It took him a full minute to grasp her horrid accusation, and then scorn of it possessed him. He stood, with his arms folded, watching her as he might have watched a vicious animal that yet lacked the power to harm him.

"You are mad, indeed," he said at length, and the strange quiet of his manner contrasted strongly with Zoe's hysterical restlessness.

"Mad!" she cried, flinging herself into a chair.

"Yes, I'm mad, so are the Pinkerton detectives 'mad,' and Mr. Treadwell is the maddest of us all. Ah, but we've fooled you to the top of your bent, though! And I'm the best actress off the boards to-day. I'm the only person in this world that can keep you too busy to see what your enemies are up to!"—the girl suddenly sat up and leaned toward him. Her voice was choking with excitement. "Do you know what I am going to do, you cold brute, you?" she exclaimed, "I am going to help you escape!" And she dropped her face into her hands.

"*You* let anything escape that you hated—not much—you are not that sort of clay!" He was looking down on her still, and his voice was colder than before. "Now that tale won't do. If I am the murderer of the only father you have ever known, why should you, of all others, help me to escape? Answer me that."

Zoe sat up. There were tears on her heavy lashes. She was somewhat quieter now, but her excitement was still intense.

"Because what is done is done. And the only sister I have ever known would be killed by a disclosure of this." A wave of intense pain swept over Girard's face. Up to that moment he had been assuring himself that the whole story was another of Zoe's mad tricks to deceive him; now, for some reason, he felt that she was telling him the truth; and with that thought came also the realization that he was in a most uncomfortable position. He was too perfectly

assured of his own innocence to dread the issue, in so far as his personal safety was concerned; but he knew what anguish his arrest for the crime would cause Helen, and his heart ached for her.

Zoe saw her opportunity and seized it:

"I am telling you the truth, I tell you; they have woven the net about you. There isn't a flaw in it. They say they have circumstantial evidence enough to hang you! But you can escape to-night!"

"And did you think I would go?" he asked.

"You will,—you must!"

"You talk like the child that you are, Zoe. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that I am innocent of this fiendish business."

"I only wish I could think so,—but my thinking couldn't help you, even if you were. You have told me yourself that many an innocent man has been convicted. I tell you, I know what I am talking about. There's not the slightest chance in the world for you. Would you stay here if you knew you were going to be hanged?"

"If the choice were the skulking away without an effort to save my reputation—yes. But this is idle folly. It is impossible that they could have secured evidence against me that would stand for a single moment."

"Tell me one thing," she panted, "does Mr. Treadwell know the criminal law?"

"As well as I do—certainly."

"Is he a shrewd, clear-headed man?"

“Yes.”

“Would he have you arrested on the charge of murder unless he had a strong case against you?”

“Treadwell would not have any man arrested on any charge, unless he had a dead sure case against him. He values his professional reputation too highly. That is why he will not touch me.”

The girl put her hands up to her breast, then turned and walked over to the window. Girard knew that she was taking something from her bosom, and he waited with a far-away, unreal sense of wonder. When Zoe faced him again, she had a letter in her hand and was holding it out to him.

“Read that,” she said simply.

Girard took it. The envelope was postmarked “New Orleans” and was addressed to Mr. Dawson at his rural post-office. A canceled registry stamp was in the corner. Girard opened the letter. It was short and without inside address or signature, and was written in a peculiar back-hand which he had seen Treadwell affect. It ran:

“Had a most amusing interview with the quarry. Told close enough onto the truth to make him squirm under it. Wanted to see how he would take it. He’ll die hard, but we’ve got him. Tried to throw me off the track—ordered me to ‘stop this damned business right here.’ Of course I stopped it. You know me! Later we called at a certain house to lay the matter before a certain other gentleman—he didn’t want to go, but I made him. The papers were not to be

found. She's got 'em, so they are ours in the long run. I have sworn out the warrant for his arrest, and will serve it in a day or two—as soon as all the wires are laid. Burn this immediately."

Girard raised his face from the paper and looked at her steadily.

"And *your* part in this?" he asked.

"Mine!"

"You told me that you were keeping me busy while my enemies were at work against me."

"I—I was."

"But you warn me now against them."

"I—I didn't know what Mr. Treadwell wanted with you. He only told me that you were hindering him, and I must keep you out of his way. I didn't know until lately—until very lately—that he was after you. Then I thought of Helen, and sent for you to come."

"How did you find out then?"

"Mr. Dawson's wife told me. I stole that letter from him the last time I was at the plantation."

"Dawson's wife!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes. Mr. Dawson is your chief accuser. He's on the inside of it all, and he told his wife a whole lot, and told her not to tell a soul, and she told me." Zoe was twisting her fingers nervously together.

"What did she tell you?" he asked.

"What I have told you. How much more, I shall not say."

"Was Treadwell really in town when he pretended to be in Chicago?"

"He didn't leave New Orleans for a day."

"Has that man, Freeman, anything to do with this infernal plot against me?"

"Yes, he has," she answered, guardedly.

"Who is he, Zoe?"

"Your bitterest enemy. The one of all others that you have most to fear."

"I must say, I could never spot him by that description," he answered. "I didn't know that I had any personal enemies except the dagos, but I am very sure I do not fear this man. Are you my enemy, Zoe?"

"Not—if—you are innocent."

"Do you believe me guilty?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"How can I say?" She was deeply agitated again, and seemed about to weep.

"Don't say, if you can't do so honestly," he hastened to put in, "but if the time comes when you can say it, you will, won't you?"

Zoe nodded in assent, then suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"Why, don't cry about that, child," exclaimed Girard anxiously. "I don't blame you at all. I would feel just as you do about it, if I were in your place. Now tell me—won't you tell me, Zoe—what is it they are doing against me?"

"No—I can't—I won't," she sobbed, "I can't do anything but help you to get away."

"I told you before that I would stay here," he answered decidedly.

The girl suddenly grasped his arm tightly with

both hands. She was looking up into his face, now, in a frenzy of excitement.

"Oh, but you must listen to me," she cried, "please—please listen! I heard Mr. Treadwell say, myself, that the evidence against you was damning. He told Mr. Dawson, the night I spent there. Mrs. Dawson and I both heard him through the cracks of the door. You can't possibly prove yourself innocent, so do think of Helen—I know that you love her, whatever you are. Oh, won't you go, and spare her this!"

"And leave my name blackened without an effort to clear it? Not for the universe! Not—for Helen!"

The door opened and Helen stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“WITHOUT THOUGHT OF ANY OTHER”

“**W**HAT is it you would not do for the universe—for me?” she asked. The crisp breath of fall had entered with her; the loose brown locks about her face were wind-blown and curling; her eyes were clear and earnest, but with a suggestion in them of latent tragedy.

The man before her gazed at her in silence for some moments.

“Tell her, Zoe,” he at length said, turning to address the younger girl. Zoe was not there. She had fled precipitately when the door opened.

“Maybe I have no right to ask,” said the girl who had just entered. “If I have none——”

“You have a right not to be kept in ignorance.” His words were quiet and deliberate, but there was veiled anguish in the gaze which he bent on her as he spoke. “Helen, they are saying that I murdered your father to get possession of his property—and you.” The girl suddenly put out her hand to the wall to steady herself. Her eyes widened with horror.

“Who says it?” she gasped, unconsciously struggling to loosen the ribbon at her throat.

“All the detective force, I understand. It seems

that the investigation of the past months has narrowed and closed around me."

"Is this a horrible jest?"

"No, it is horrible earnest," he answered.

"We are both of us dreaming," she said, pressing her hand to her eyes, then staring out at the waving trees to reassure herself.

"Helen!" he cried out suddenly. There was no proud masking now; his anguished soul was naked before her in the gaze that she turned to meet—"Helen, do *you* believe in my innocence?"

"Do I believe in my *own* innocence? Oh, my dear!" The next moment her arms would have been about his neck had he not caught both her hands on his shoulders and stayed them there for a deep look into her eyes.

The blue truth of heaven answered him.

In all the years of their love for each other, Helen had never seen the clear, stern eyes of the man clouded by even a suggestion of weeping; now, all suddenly, as he looked into her soul, a quick rush of tears filled his eyes almost to overflowing, and he caught her to him, perhaps that she might not see.

"Why didn't you know without asking?" she whispered, with her head on his shoulder.

"I know, now, that I did."

After a little, when he was sure of his own self-control, and when the first throes of the new agony were over for Helen, he told her at length the details of the interrupted interview. When he finished,

Helen insisted on sending for Zoe, to demand of her the whole truth. But the servant returned to report that she was nowhere to be found.

"Is Mr. Frank here?" Helen asked.

"No'm," replied the new maid, respectfully, and closed the door behind her.

"Helen," said Girard, as soon as the girl was out of hearing, "on second thought, I believe it will be best for us to say nothing till we see what is to come of this. At least, I don't want you to say anything. I can take care of myself."

"Why, Herbert," she exclaimed, "do you suppose that I shall allow this thing to go on?—I'm going to stop it instantly, I am going to—to——"

"Fight all my battles for me," he put in. "No, dearie, you are going to do nothing of the kind. You are going to keep silent as I tell you—as I ask you. You are not even going to challenge Frank and Zoe on the subject, till I give you permission to speak. Isn't that so, dear heart?" Instead of answering, she hurried on to another question:

"But what if it should all come out? What if they should arrest you, and charge you openly with this horrible thing?"

"That is what they will, what they must do."

"But, Herbert, Herbert! Think of the agony, the disgrace, of having it cried from one end of the State to another."

"Think of the agony, the disgrace, of not having it brought to the test, since I am suspected and ac-

cused. Helen, my brave girl, you will have to nerve yourself up to this. You can do it, and I know you will, for my sake."

"No—no," she pleaded. "You will not ask me to. You will let me stop it now. You will, for my sake!"

"That is the one thing I would not do for you, Helen," he answered.

"But suppose you should not be able to—to——" she turned very white, and stopped.

"Why, I shall, of course, darling; now don't begin to agonize over that. It is preposterous to imagine anything else for an instant."

"Herbert, you told me once that you never knew Mr. Treadwell to fail. You said that you regarded him almost with superstition, he was so successful."

"Yes, I did, and that is what makes this blunder so incredible to me. He has," he said half-musingly, "yes, he must have a pretty stout chain of evidence—why Helen! You dear little, scared girl, you. He can't convict me. Brace up, 'comrade,' this won't do—this won't do."

It was quite dark when he rose to go, but a flood of light poured in at the door when he opened it. The gas in the hall had been lighted. There was the sound of life and stir in the house. Helen rose, too, and picked up her hat from the chair where she had tossed it on first entering. Girard was surprised to see her gather her stray locks into place and pin her hat firmly on her head.

"Where are you going, dear?" he asked. "It's dark now."

"With you," she answered simply.

"Where to?" He looked a little puzzled.

"Wherever you go, from now on to the end."

"Helen! My darling, my precious darling!——"

In a few minutes he put her from him at arm's length, but the hands that still grasped her round arms were shaking. "My God, how I should love to take you with me!" he groaned.

"You don't have to 'take' me," panted the girl between spasmodic sobs, "I am quite able to take myself, and I am going to do it."

"But I can't let you, sweetheart." He released her now, and drew further away, as if to escape the temptation she offered him. "I cannot marry you, Helen, with a cloud over my name. Do you suppose I would share even seeming dishonor with you? I *love* you, dear, don't you understand?"

"Yes, but you need me, and I am going with you." Then there flashed into the minds of both the words that he had said to her that night when they had quarreled so seriously—"You will know the man of your real love by this unfailing sign, you will go to him, when he needs you, without hesitation, without thought of any other."

The man rested his arm on the door-facing and bowed his head upon it. Both he and she were silent for a time. In a few minutes, Helen went over to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Don't you remember Zoe's advice to us when we quarreled?" she asked, trying to speak lightly to relieve the tension of the scene. "We couldn't do better now than 'get married, and fight it out,' as she so often urged. Herbert, my darling, take me with you. It is my right."

He turned on her almost fiercely:

"Don't, *don't*, Helen. My God, girl! would you make me less than a man?" She drew back from him, quickly; and there was another long silence, in which both struggled to get back on safe ground again. After a few moments, Girard asked, in a forcedly quiet tone:

"Little girl, where now are the fierce differences that have kept us apart all these months?"

"I suspect there are still enough of them within summoning distance to keep us from boring each other to death, in the future," she said, guardedly, too.

"Helen, I have never known until this hour the possibilities of woman's nature——"

"You don't know yet," she replied, fighting away from the serious again, "and I suspect it is just as well for your peace of mind that you don't. But you will have all the rest of life to learn in, and me to be your teacher and—and——"

"And 'good comrade,'" he added, with a great peace in his heart in spite of the storm that threatened from without.

When they stood on the front steps in the starlight

to say good-by, his temptation had to be throttled again.

"Do you know," he said to her, "I have never in my life bade you good-by like this—without feeling an almost irresistible impulse to snatch you up bodily and run off with you; and now, just to think, I might, and yet I must not. But if I could, if I could!"

He left her sweet presence and went out into the night—but not alone. "I am going with you everywhere, from now on to the end," Helen had said to him, and the promise came back to him with the weight of prophecy. She was with him now—in spirit—and he knew that she would be with him to the end. Something had been swept from between them in that last hour, that had left them, after years of supposed sympathy and understanding, at last, heart to heart. He knew now that he had never understood her. He knew now that what he had missed so sadly in his life, was the strong, inspiring woman element that he had so long undervalued. He had called her "comrade" in that hour of awakening, and comrade she should be "to the end."

The end? He paused at the thought. What end? It was the first time that that question had presented itself. Could it be possible that there was real danger ahead of him? Up to that moment, he had entertained no thought, whatever, but of being easily able to establish his innocence. "Just suppose——" but he would not allow himself to suppose such a thing,

and he dismissed the thought peremptorily. However, there was no uncertainty about the fact that Treadwell had a case against him that was going to give him trouble, and this thought he did not try to dismiss.

But what evidence could Treadwell possibly have? he asked himself, again and again; and again and again he got the same answer from the farthest recesses of his imagination—Treadwell was going to try to convict him of complicity in the murder, doubtless, of instigating it. That could mean but one thing—that Treadwell had his hands on the person or persons whom he supposed to have committed the deed. But who? Here the lawyer's imagination went wild and conjured up all manner of unheard-of complications.

The one phase of the case which he could not account for, was the man, Freeman—the one against whom Zoe had given him her most solemn warning. It was very evident to Girard that the man was not what he represented himself to be, and that his business on Mr. Lawrence's plantation was a pretense. But who this enemy was who went to such lengths against him, the lawyer could not even surmise.

Girard made up his mind very promptly as to his course. He would communicate with Ballard & Ballard that very night, and put his case in their hands. Tom Ballard had been his closest friend for fifteen years, and was one of the shrewdest, most discreet lawyers in the State. He would also caution

Helen, again, to keep silent. He found it hard to believe that Frank Lawrence had been apprised of the course the investigation had taken, for he could recall only the frankest confidence in the young man's manner toward him. Young Lawrence was so open and straightforward in all his own dealings, the lawyer reasoned, that it would be difficult to make him suspect others, especially those whom he had learned to trust; and he was too transparently honest to play a part, himself. Most assuredly, Frank Lawrence was being kept in the dark.

With this conviction there came into the lawyer's mind the idea of laying the whole matter before the young fellow, and of resigning his own position as his business agent. The idea, however, departed as quickly as it came. Frank would, without doubt, take the position that his sister had taken, and this he could not allow. Then, to resign his agency now would look to his accusers like panic. No, he would keep a tight grip on every vestige of power that he possessed, and let them do their worst.

He smiled to himself, grimly, as he thought how completely he had the old man's affairs in his own hands, and what a telling point for the prosecution the fact would be. But the prosecution would need more telling points—and he found himself at sea again.

He was, however, no longer bewildered on the subject that had perplexed him for months past. He understood Zoe at last; and his mind now turned to

the certain comprehension of her, as a relief from its new perplexities.

In the light which her confession threw on her actions, Girard beheld her with much more of admiration than theretofore. He did not blame her for the part she had played as Treadwell's tool; it was natural, he told himself, and right, in so far as she understood the right. It was but human that the man should admire the abandon with which the girl proposed to sacrifice everything else for the one that she loved, albeit it was a course that he, himself, would not have considered for a moment.

As he remembered now the innocent earnestness with which she had begged him to fly, and the genuine distress with which she had met his refusal to do so, he forgave her, and pitied her—nay, he even felt a certain tenderness for her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

YOUNG LAWRENCE DEMANDS AN EXPLANATION

MR. TREADWELL had not finished his breakfast the next morning, before a note from Frank Lawrence was handed him. It was only a few penciled lines, bearing the statement that the young man awaited the detective in his office on important business, and would be glad of an early interview with him.

Treadwell read the note, grunted, and went on with his meal.

The restaurant waiter, who was shadowing the detective, as one of that gentleman's confidential employes might have done, saw no change in the man's unmannerly brusqueness of mood. Mr. Treadwell proceeded with his eating with stab of knife and thrust of fork as if the whole business of life were the rending of his prey into swallowable bits.

Nevertheless, when the waiter retreated with the unsettled bill and a five-dollar gold-piece in his hand, the detective shoved his coffee cup from him and stared at the man's vanishing back with something in his eyes which might have been mistaken for speculation.

Half an hour later, he presented himself at his

office in reply to the hasty summons. Frank Lawrence was walking impatiently up and down the inner office room to which he had been exiled by the busy men in front. The young man was evidently laboring under increased excitement. His face was flushed to the brows, and his eyes looked feverish. Almost forgetting, for once, his inborn courtesy, he paid little heed to the detective's suave morning greeting; and plunged nervously into business as soon as they were alone together.

"My sister tells me, Mr. Treadwell," he began, "that this investigation you are employed on, has taken a most singular turn. I have come to you this morning to hear the truth of the matter."

"What turn?" asked the detective, without blinking an eyelash. He had closed the door between them and the outer office, carefully.

"A turn which threatens to incriminate my father's trusted agent and my friend," answered the young man, quickly.

"Which one of your sisters said so?" Treadwell's words were slow and deliberate, but his eyelids quivered, and a less suspectful man than Frank Lawrence might have seen momentary consternation in the depths of the yellow irises beneath.

Young Lawrence checked himself suddenly in an intended reply, then added, guardedly:

"I can't see that that information would affect your story. I hope, Mr. Treadwell, that you will appreciate my position in regard to the matter, and

will recognize my right to be put in possession of all the facts concerning it."

"Of course, of course," answered the other, "but suppose I don't see fit to furnish you with these facts just yet."

"Then I will abandon the case against Mr. Girard, and dispense with your services."

"Well," drawled the other, "suppose again, that I do ante up and prove to you that your father was murdered at this man's instigation?"

Young Lawrence recoiled, but his eyes burnt like live coals.

"Then I'll see him hanged with my own eyes!" he exclaimed, passionately.

But the detective was evidently not yet ready to yield.

"It isn't usual, Mr. Lawrence," he said, parrying still, "for the man employed in working up a case to give away his material to anyone. He isn't expected or asked to do so, you know."

"But you are expected and asked to do so here, Mr. Treadwell. This is a unique case."

The two men looked at each other for a full minute. What the young man saw was only the inscrutable, surface expression with which the man of cunning veiled what lay in the depths of his shrewd brain; but the detective looked into a pair of eyes that had not yet learned to dissemble, and he suddenly realized that he had a man to deal with. Treadwell had been no slower than Girard in recognizing that

the late stress of circumstances—instead of breaking the spirit of the young fellow—had suddenly strengthened and ennobled him. It was in full recognition of this fact that the detective now regarded him.

Treadwell had worried the lawyer by suggesting to him that he could follow the investigation to the end on his own responsibility; and would probably do so, if opposed in his course. And he had given point to his covert threat by suggesting that he might come out of the affair with an added reputation for shrewdness. He had not suggested, however, and the lawyer had not taken time to see, that whatever gain such a course might mean to his reputation for sagacity, there would necessarily be to him an overbalancing loss of reputation for trustworthiness. But Treadwell was too sharp to have missed the point, himself, and after a slight pause he said:

“Very well, sir, I’ll give you the facts as they stand.” With a comprehensive glance at their surroundings, Mr. Treadwell hitched his chair closer to his listener, and began:

“First, Mr. Lawrence, I want to remind you that a detective is merely a transmitter of cold facts. He has no personal interest in the case under his hands, and no personal responsibility for what he brings to light. He is supposed to have no sentiments, no shrinkings, no prejudices for or against. It would be well for you to keep this in mind, and to—excuse me—take hold of the matter in the same spirit.”

The young man bowed gravely, and the other continued:

"Nineteen years ago, there lived on your father's plantation an octoroon girl named Lizzie Cain who was noted for miles around for her beauty. She had been educated, too, and is said to have been a singularly bright and alluring woman. Now this same Eli Sanders was there too, a great hulking, handsome brute, with a demon in him so big that it stuck out all around the edges. Sanders fell madly in love with the girl and married her. Of course, like the rest of his kind, he thought his wife his to abuse and neglect; and, of course, the woman, who had had a taste of something better, pretty soon began to hate him.

"Well, time passed on, and it came to be whispered about the quarters that Lizzie had a 'beau.' It seems that Eli didn't hear the talk at first—he was so notoriously violent I suspect they were all afraid to tell him—and one bright day, Lizzie, with her month-old girl baby, disappeared from the plantation, leaving nothing behind to account for her going but a short note to Eli. This note stated that she was off to live in a fine house that was to be all her own, and that she didn't want any more 'niggers' around her. She added fuel to the flame by assuring Eli that he needn't mind about the baby, as it wasn't his, anyway,—adding that she was going to see that it was brought up 'white.' Now you know, sir, or you probably don't know at your age, that that

type of man is just the stuff to make a demon of, and that that injury is the surest process of all for such a metamorphosis. Well, Sanders swore by all heaven and hell to kill the man who had wronged him, if it took a lifetime to do it in. As it was, it took him eighteen years to find out the identity of the man, and he did so at last through the agency of a white man.

“Ten months after the woman’s disappearance, Mr. Lawrence, a baby was left on your father’s doorstep. He took the child in and raised her as his own against the protests of his wife and sister-in-law. He refused to open the papers left with her, though they begged him to do so. If he read those papers later—and it’s only reasonable to suppose he did—he never breathed one word of their contents to any living soul. When the girl grew older, and herself pressed him for them, *he could not find them*. When he made his will, he left her a child’s share in his property. As for your connection with her, and your father’s action in regard to it”—he was hazarding a shrewd guess—“you know that without my telling.” He paused a moment, uneasily. The young fellow was turning slowly away from him, and his face was deadly pale. Treadwell wondered if he were going to fall from his chair, and half put out his hand to steady him.

With his face quite away, Lawrence asked, in a labored voice:

“Go on—my father——?”

"Your father, Mr. Lawrence, was murdered about three o'clock in the afternoon on which you missed him." The young man whirled in his chair and faced him again. His breath was coming deep and hard.

"By whom?" he groaned.

"Eli Sanders executed the deed. 'Your father's trusted agent and your friend' instigated it. Your father's weakness in earlier years, his too great trust of men in financial matters, and his successful opposition to the man as your sister's suitor, together, furnished the motive."

"Prove this to me."

"I will."

"Have you the witnesses to prove it?"

"I have. I am not so careless of my reputation as to go into court without the proof of what I say, Mr. Lawrence. I see you don't know me——"

"Begin at the beginning and let me have it all," interrupted the other.

"Good enough," assented the detective. "Well, now, your father, as you know, was in the habit of going out to his plantation every Friday, leaving immediately after breakfast for the trip. Now on this particular Friday—the last one, you know—instead of following his usual course, he left the house for down town as soon as breakfast was over. It seems that he didn't tell anybody but Miss Zoe of his change of plan, but he assured her that he would not go to the plantation that day. Well, sir, the next thing

he did was to go straight to his lawyer's office. I shall prove by a reputable witness that Mr. Girard was very much surprised to see him, and remarked when he met him, that he had thought the old gentleman well on his way to the country by that time. Now, I know through you, for one, that Mr. Lawrence went there that morning for the express purpose of adding a codicil to his will. And I ask you, sir, to recall and to note the peculiar phrasing of it: 'Transferring the guardianship of my *daughter*, Zoe, from Herbert Girard to her *brother*, Frank Lawrence, and commending her to my son's peculiar care—to be, always, his *sister*.' Witness number one will testify that after that matter was over, a long argument ensued between your father and Mr. Girard, in which the latter undertook to convince Mr. Lawrence, and did convince him, it seems, that affairs at the plantation needed his immediate attention, and that it would be very much to his disadvantage to give up his trip that day."

Frank Lawrence's whole being seemed now merged into the sense of hearing; he scarcely breathed as the other man continued:

"Witness number two will testify that immediately on your father's departure from the office, Girard procured the best horse in the Huey stables and took the Frankfort road at almost a gallop. Now, you see, the Frankfort road crosses the Carrollton not an eighth of a mile beyond the bridge in Carter's lane, and between that point and the city the Carrollton

road is long and roundabout, while the other is shorter and more direct. Girard was riding a fast horse, and your father was on a regular old jog-trotter. Girard had plenty of time to reach the point of intersection, ride back the Carrollton to the bridge, warn any person hiding there of the unwonted delay of the prey, and be well on his way back to town by the Frankfort road before your father reached the lane from the southeast."

The detective paused to allow his words to make a deeper impression, and Lawrence put in, excitedly:

"But if you could prove conclusively that Girard traveled every inch of the ground just as you have described it, I can't see anything absolutely damning in that!"

"Why, no, of course not," said the detective calmly. "But, you see, that don't happen to be all. Now, witness number three will testify to the fact that the man Sanders had the deep grudge against your father that would render him just the tool the other man needed; that Sanders was seen by witness lurking about the vicinity of Carter's bridge on the very day the crime was committed; that Sanders was in New Orleans on the day before the tragedy, and was seen by said witness coming out of the lawyer's sleeping-room after twelve o'clock that night."

"Who is this witness?" demanded the young man, springing to his feet with distorted features.

"None other, sir, than Roger Dawson—a man who has been in your father's employ since before Herbert

Girard was out of knee pants—a man who, next to Girard, knows your father's business better than anyone else—a man whose testimony in regard to Girard's management of your father's estate will, of itself, be pretty tight evidence against him. You see——”

“Look here, Mr. Treadwell,” broke in the restless listener, “how could a man of Girard's character and reputation do such a deed? It is inhuman, it is abnormal—it is——”

“It's all of that, Mr. Lawrence. A little apprentice work in the detective business would teach you not to expect crime to be either ‘normal’ or ‘human,’ and not to search for it only in the low walks of life, either. Read up a little on the history of crime, and study the ‘characters’ and ‘reputations’ borne by some of the most noted criminals before their detection, and say if a man should be allowed to go free on his general good name about town, when all the facts of the case are against him.”

“But the motives you give!” exclaimed the young man, the cold sweat breaking out on his forehead; “they are so low, so beneath the man!”

“In your own knowledge of him, Mr. Lawrence, would you say that money and the power that money brings are things that this man would not grasp at?”

“No—but I would have said that they are things he would not grasp for at the expense of honesty. And how do you make it that, by this deed, he could actually obtain these things? Am I blind that I

should stand by and let a man cheat me and my own out of our father's property? Do you suppose he thought I would——” The detective smiled, but only with his eyes, and he veiled them quickly.

“Haven't you been 'blind' to his management of your father's affairs, Mr. Lawrence? Haven't you done just what he thought you would do?” he asked.

The young man was silent. After a moment or two he said:

“And you think—my sister?” The detective leaned forward and said impressively:

“Your father had a hold on her, sir, that could not be loosened while he lived. If Mr. Lawrence had been allowed to remain among you, you know as well as I can tell you, that she would never have been drawn away from his influence. That man knew this, and he loved her—loved her with the half-insane, blind passion of his type that will take no denial. If you've ever taken one good look into his eyes, Mr. Lawrence, you know, for yourself, that he is a man who will not brook defeat. There's a smoldering fire under the ice of his exterior that isn't safe, to say the least. And note the fact, sir, that he didn't soil his own hands with the crime. Indeed, the part he played in it was done by the subtlest suggestion; but he took care to plant his suggestions where they would bear fruit. As for Sanders, Mr. Lawrence, we have absolute proof of the fact that he was in the vicinity of Carter's bridge on the day of the crime; that he changed his clothes on the boat on which he escaped

and immediately burned the ones he took off, and that he carried a dirk on his person that day."

"But, Mr. Treadwell," broke in his listener, "I thought Sanders had established an alibi?"

"Bribed his witnesses, sir; it is often done," and he took up his narrative again: "We can prove also that Sanders came to New Orleans on June the eleventh in answer to a summons from Girard. I have in my possession Girard's letter to him."

"May I see it?" asked the other quickly.

"Oh, yes," assented the detective with easy concession. He rose from his chair and crossed the room to a large safe in the corner. After carefully working out the combination, he pulled the door open and began searching in a small inner compartment. In another minute he rose ponderously with a letter in his hand. Lawrence, in his impatience, had joined him, and stood eager to receive the note. Opening it as soon as it touched his hand, his eye ran quickly over the contents:

"New Orleans, La.,
"June 8th, 1891.

"To Eli Sanders,
Vicksburg, Miss.

"If you will come to New Orleans promptly on receipt of this, I can give you a job that will pay you well. Don't let anything stand in your way, as it is a fine opportunity for you. Call at my office as soon as you arrive.

"(Mr.) HERBERT GIRARD."

The handwriting was unmistakably Girard's, and

the letter was to the negro who was supposed to have headed the plot against Mr. Lawrence's life.

Frank Lawrence dropped the missive as if it burnt his finger and stood with his arms on the back of a high chair, looking at the detective with an intense expression in his eyes that made the man of no feeling experience a ghost of discomfort.

"How, in the name of heaven, did you find it all out? When did you first suspect him?" the young man asked, and his voice sounded strange.

"Ah, well," said the other, motioning him to a seat again, "that will all come out in court in its own proper time. I don't mind confessing to you, however, that the fellow eluded me for a pretty long time. Indeed, I had worked up—in theory—all that about Sanders and the girl—I—I beg your pardon, Miss Zoe, I should have said—before I found *him* in it at all. I thought, at first, that Sanders was the only guilty one, and, working on that theory, I began to probe for his motive. In the probing process, my instruments accidentally touched this lawyer friend of yours, and the rest came without much trouble. You should have seen your friend wince when I first asked him to help me find out something about *her*. It didn't take him long, though, to flatly refuse; and after that he began to throw all sorts of obstacles in my way. We've had an interesting time of it, he and I together, I can tell you, and last Friday we got together in a mighty close box. He suspicioned that I was on to him, and tried to bluff me off the track.

It was a neat thing to see, sir, how I told him a whole lot of the truth to get to watch his face as he heard it. Lord, but he was a picture! He was excited, I can tell you, but he tried hard to make me believe he was just mad. You see I knew he couldn't take panic and give me the slip—I had him spotted. I made him come up to your house with me that night just to watch him again. Did you catch on to the way he handled that desk lock?" Treadwell's suppressed chuckle was stopped short by the look on the young man's face.

"Well?" insisted young Lawrence.

"Well, I don't mind telling you further that that gi—that—your adopted sister—was no end of help to me at first in her innocent, unsuspecting way. It didn't take *him* long, though, to suspect that I was pumping her, and he soon blocked my little game there; but, unfortunately for him, he was not quite quick enough. Then he, in his turn, began to try to influence her against me. 'And, damn him, he did do it.

"About this time it occurred to me that I'd best drop off the scene for a spell, and I, accordingly, dropped. My visit to Chicago was really spent in Frenchtown, whence I sallied out, from time to time, in a new suit and a most unbecoming set of whiskers, to keep an eye on him"—he reached out suddenly and tapped the young man's arm delightedly. "Sir, I wrote you that letter asking that your sister come to the *Lafitte* at the lugger-landing for information

about your father." The detective paused, as if for some burst of astonishment or admiration, but the young fellow before him did not move a muscle, and he continued:

"I figured it out this way: That you would all take it to mean your sister, Miss Helen, and also that she would want to go; that you wouldn't let her; and that it would end by the little one's fooling you all and going on her own hook—you see, I had sized her up pretty cute."

"But did she? Did Zoe *do that?*" burst from the young man.

"She did that——" the other began, when Frank stopped him peremptorily:

"Do you mean that you decoyed her from home at night to that place? Mr. Treadwell!" Treadwell caught the fire in the young man's eyes, and said—rather quickly for him:

"I, myself, went with her, sir, every step of the way, but of course she didn't know." The indignation in Lawrence's eyes abated so little that Treadwell hurried on to distract him: "You see, sir, the whole gist of the business was I had found out that there was somewhere a package of papers that would tell me all about her. Now, at that time, I thought it almost absolutely necessary to the development of the scheme to get hold of these same papers. I believed that the girl could be made to get them for me; and I fixed up a man to meet her in the boat, and tell her that she would find out all about your

father only by mailing those papers to a certain box as soon as ever she could lay her hands on them. The man I sent to interview her had his orders to say that he was acting for the Mafia, so she'd be scared to refuse." The detective tilted his chair back on its hind legs, nodded his head delightedly several times, and exclaimed:

"And, Mr. Lawrence, you can eat me, if she *didn't* refuse. She talked up to that there man of ours like he was dirt under her feet;—said she didn't know where the papers were, and if she did, she certainly wouldn't give 'em out of her hands till she had an assurance that our end of the bargain would be held up."

The thought of a foeman worthy of his steel had momentarily betrayed the detective into showing how he enjoyed appreciable opposition. However, his listener's stern attitude toward the subject caused him, the next minute, to assume again his cold professional manner, and he continued:

"That was one of the times, Mr. Lawrence, when I would have given five thousand dollars for five minutes more of time. The—Miss Zoe—had hardly met our man and exchanged a few sentences with him—not long enough to have half done the work—when another man appeared on the scene. And that man was—Girard!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed his listener. "Did you see him?"

"I was there to see and hear, Mr. Lawrence, and

"I did both. There's no doubt about who the man was. What he wanted was what made me think twice. He knew about the letter, and he knew better than any living man, except myself, that it was a forgery, but he thought it was a trick of somebody's to extort money from you. On second thoughts I was disgusted with myself for my density. Of course Girard got to puzzling over it, and decided that there was danger of your sister Helen's slipping off from you and going down to the place alone and unprotected, and he went to make sure that no harm came to her. I shall always believe, also, that he had his curiosity aroused by the letter. He ain't scared of many things, you know."

"But what did he do? What did she and you and the other man do when he came?" asked the young man, excitedly.

"Why, I wasn't on the boat, you see. I followed him down as far as Seare & Co.'s sugar-shed, and kept pretty close to him, till he started to cross the levee. There was too much light there, for suspicious characters like me, so I had to make myself comfortable behind a stack of molasses barrels, and wait developments. Well, sir, I saw your friend cross the open stretch of levee toward the old boat I had described in my letter at a pretty quick pace, then I lost him in the shadow of the hull. Pretty soon, I thought I heard some one scream—but I knew Peters was there and would take care of the girl. Besides, I didn't fear anything for her from Girard. Then, in about two

minutes' time, I saw two figures—a man's and a woman's—coming across the levee toward me. When they got near enough for me to see that it was Girard, and not Peters, who was with her, I held my peace, and followed as best I could without being seen. Down about Chartres and St. Louis, he signaled to a hack, and the two got in. I ran the risk of my life of discovery and failure there, for I had to come almost up to them to do what I did. I'm not saying that I regret it, though. In the moment when he was helping her in, I crept near enough to touch him, and climbed up on the back of the hack. I heard him warn her, over and over again, against giving me any information whatever. He also extracted a promise from her to tell *him* anything that she knew, but never to talk to me, by herself. And part of the compact was that you were to be kept in the dark."

"You heard this, yourself, Mr. Treadwell?" asked his astonished auditor.

"I heard this, myself, Mr. Lawrence."

"But Peters? What did he say about his experience with them in the boat?" asked the young man, quickly.

"Why, just what I have told you as far as his own interview with her was concerned. That's the part that is so unsatisfactory to me. He hadn't spoken a half-dozen sentences to her when Girard appeared on the scene and the girl darted over to him, though Peters says that nobody but a cat could have recognized the man in that black dark. When she

did that, Peters very discreetly fell back into the deeper shadows, to listen. He said he couldn't catch a word they said, though; but that Girard struck a match, and he recognized him by the light of it. He—Peters, I mean—said that the girl showed fear for the first time then; for she almost screamed out something about being taken home; and that she and Girard went off together. I have told you the rest."

"Could they have possibly met there by appointment?" asked the young man, in an awestruck tone.

"They did not meet by appointment," answered the detective. "What I heard of their conversation on their return from the boat showed that."

"What do you make of it all?" demanded the other.

"Why, just what I have told you. She went on a venture; so did he. She is casting about wildly for any sort of clue about your father; he is moving heaven and earth to keep me from finding out just what I have told you about her. You see, for me to get that, meant for me to lay hands on Sanders next, after that, on him—Girard—the man I wanted."

"And you have done it, you say? You have witnesses to prove all these things?" cried the young man, springing to his feet.

"I have. I have also a warrant for Girard's arrest. I have waited on some minor details before serving it, but I am ready now."

The detective watched the tense face before him apprehensively. The great purple veins on the young man's forehead seemed not able to retain the blood

that surged into them. All suddenly, however, every vestige of color fled from his agonized face, and he dropped into his chair with his arms and head on the table. Only one word escaped him:

"Zoe!"

The detective, who had no knowledge of the last interview between father and son, and who, had he been present from start to finish, would have been incapable of understanding all that it meant to a man of Frank Lawrence's type, now rose, perplexed. For some moments—unconscionably long ones to the man of action—he stood over the bowed form of the young man, and curiously noted the cut of his coat in the back. The strange silence of the room was intensified by the sounds of conversation in the next office, and the far-away noises of the street beyond seemed only to isolate more completely the two silent men.

At length Treadwell spoke:

"Man, you surely can't be hesitating!" Lawrence looked up.

"No, not hesitating," he said slowly. "You may destroy that warrant, and wipe out—for God's sake wipe out—what you have done!"

Treadwell recoiled in blank amazement.

"But you consented once to let me use those papers in evidence—you tried to find them for me," he protested.

"Only to save my father from possible torture," replied the young man. "Now, now that he is dead——"

"But your father's murderer?" exclaimed the other, under his breath.

"Leave him to me," replied the son.

"Now see here," said the detective, drawing up a chair quickly and taking his seat close in front of the young man, "you'll do nothing of the kind. You've got too much sense, you have. And you are your father's son. Let's wait a bit and think the matter over calmly. He'll not get away, I promise you. He couldn't get out of New Orleans with my men watching him, unless he went up in a balloon, and, to my certain knowledge, he hasn't got one. Take a day or two off and think about it calmly, now, won't you?"

"I have already thought the matter out to its only conclusion," replied the other, with a strange composure.

"You have, have you? Well, that's good. But I've done a little thinking in the last few minutes, myself, and I, too, have come to a conclusion. Frankly, it's just this: I've got this situation in my hands. I can bring it to an open issue when I choose. I am the man who can stop it. I am the only man who can serve or suppress the warrant. Now, then, you are a gentleman, and so am I; I say to you, 'I will not move in this matter for two days, if you give me your word you'll do nothing rash in that time.' What do you say?"

Young Lawrence was looking beyond him, and did not answer. The detective changed his tactics, and

there was a note of sincerity in his voice as he spoke again:

"Mr. Lawrence, have I served you well in the past few months?"

"You have, indeed," said the young man, answering him as sincerely.

"Does my advice, then, deserve your consideration?" Lawrence looked at him a moment, and then said, slowly:

"Yes, and shall have it."

"On your word as a gentleman?" asked the detective, eagerly.

"My word is always the word of a gentleman," answered the other.

CHAPTER THIRTY

FRANK AND HELEN

WHEN Frank Lawrence left the detective's office and made his way to Carondelet street, he was a man apart from the world about him. The ordinary trials and sorrows of humanity are indeed a bond of human brotherhood, but calamity is isolation.

Fortunately for him, the young man had reached that mental state where numbness succeeds acute suffering; where—the crisis of pain having been experienced—he could look the future in the face with an insensible calm. So he walked on through the familiar crowd, in it, yet not of it—unseeing, uncaring. He was conscious of making his way homeward, and he had a far-away feeling that, arrived there, he would have Helen to meet and reckon with. Now, however, there was a certain cessation of thought and feeling, and he drifted on, too numb to be thankful for the relief.

The way he took soon brought his instinct-guided steps to the green restfulness of Lafayette Square, and he sank down on a convenient bench, and looked about him with unperceiving eyes. Time glided on; he took no notice of its passing. Loungers came and went, but he scarcely heard their footsteps.

At length, he made a supreme effort to rouse him-

self to the situation. He must make some preparation for the meeting with Helen; that at last became plain to him. Try as he would, he could not shake off the coma of feeling into which he had sunk, but he could force himself to think, and he did—by the sheer power of will.

The matter concerning his father's sin should be forever silenced; and his father's murderer should be silenced, too—and forever. But he would not strike even so black a villain as Girard off his guard, he determined; the man should have a chance to defend himself, in the old-time way. It did not seem strange or unnatural to the young fellow that he should sit there and deliberately plan the death of his sometime friend. Nothing was strange to him now, nothing unnatural. It seemed to him that he and his had been marked by a relentless fate and set apart for pain.

Helen must know about Girard, he reflected; but not about *the other*. She should be spared the crisis of agony that it had been his to suffer. There was enough on the surface of things, he reasoned, to explain, without a seeming improbability, Girard's part in the crime. Helen must be allowed to see only the surface; and, at all odds, Helen must be saved from their father's murderer.

And Zoe? Zoe, above all others, must be kept from a knowledge of the truth. Then, from an almost infinitely remote past—remote because of the ages of heartache that lay between then and now—he heard his father's voice:

"It will all come right, somehow. Frank, you will take my place here, and see that it does. You inherit the consequences of my mistakes. God help you to bear them rightly. Frank, my son, we cannot change now. It would be cruel to separate her from us. And you will remember always that she is to be 'your sister'; you will remember, my son." And out of that past came also his own reply:

"Yes, sir, I will remember."

"I will remember," he repeated now, as a new token of covenant. And he rose to his feet and took his way to fulfill his promise.

His sister was on the front gallery waiting for him and for the news that he should bring. She came to the steps to meet him, and the eager inquiry in her eyes deepened suddenly to apprehension when she saw the expression on his face.

He took her by the hand, and they looked at each other for a moment, but neither spoke.

"Come to the study," he at length said, as they entered the hall together. "Come where the others won't know, and I will tell you."

The choosing of that place, of all others, for their interview was, of itself, ominous to Helen's sensitive imagination; and when the door closed behind them, and they were alone in the oppressive quiet, she came very near breaking down altogether.

"You have turned against him, too—oh, Frank!"

"Helen, he is guilty," he answered simply.

"On my soul, he is not!"

The tears that flooded her eyes when she first spoke, now dried as quickly as they had risen, and Frank was suddenly reminded of his father's stern moods as she looked him in the eyes unflinchingly.

Her brother had expected this. He knew Helen, of old. He was too nearly her prototype not to kindle sympathetically at her unquestioning loyalty; but he could not allow her spirit to infect him and so deter him from what was plainly imperative. Helen must know the truth. Then, the right course being plain to her, she would follow it at whatever cost.

With a loving tenderness of manner that was born of their mutual sorrow, he recounted to her the cruel facts of the evidence against her lover, leaving out only the part involving Zoe's hidden history. Helen did not interrupt his narrative, but stood with her fearless eyes on his face with scarcely a shifting glance to relieve their strained intensity. When he had quite finished, and had dwelt at length on Girard's note to Sanders, she asked promptly:

"And you believe this?"

"Most certainly I do. And so must you, Helen."

"I do not, and will not."

"Why, Helen, have you taken leave of your senses? What do you make of it then?"

"A deep-laid, far-reaching plot against him. I—I—almost believe that Satan himself has come out of his confines to lay it. It is all so cruel, so mysterious. I tell you, Frank, you don't know what you are talking about," she was growing excited now. "There is

something behind it all—something black and horrible that is shadowing us, and we shall blunder fatally unless we unmask it. Frank, you will not prosecute him! It is not he that——”

“No,” he said, pained at the deception his words must carry, “I shall not prosecute him. I have promised Mr. Treadwell that I will wait two days before taking any steps whatever—but my mind is made up.”

“Oh, Frank, you are so good to me!” and she abandoned herself to a blessed, healing flood of tears. “They can’t do anything to him, now,” she sobbed. “He will be furious, but he can’t help himself; and when he gets time, he will prove to you how cruelly you have misjudged him.”

“Helen!” exclaimed her brother, taking her by the shoulder almost roughly, “you don’t understand me, but the time is coming when you shall. I tell you that Herbert Girard is our enemy! I shall hold him so in my latest hour; and by the memory of our murdered father—so shall you!”

“Frank, my brother!” said the girl quickly, raising her tear-stained face to look at him and placing both her hands on his breast, “he is more to me than the memory of our father.”

Frank looked at her in silence, but there was pity and not reproach in his gaze. Here was another reason, and the most vital yet, he thought, why the man should be reckoned with.

He took her hands from his breast and, dropping them, not unkindly, turned and left her.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

FOR HONOR

. . . "For honour,
'Tis a derivative from me to mine,
And only that I stand for."

FRANK had no sooner left her, than Helen went to the telephone and asked for connection with Girard's office. Mr. Girard was out, the stenographer told her, and would not be in until late in the afternoon, if at all that day. The girl did not know where her employer could be found. Helen hung up the receiver impatiently.

There was no trace of tears in the deep blue eyes now, no wavering in look or tone. Helen knew something, and had something to do, and her spirit rose to the occasion. It was only inaction and uncertainty that could damp her splendid courage.

She no more thought of shrinking from disclosing to Girard now what her brother had told her, than she had hesitated to go straight to Frank with what her lover had cautioned her not to mention. If her fear for Girard had been less great, his trust in her would have kept her silent when he depended on her not to betray his confidence. Under ordinary circumstances, too, she would not have thought of repeating what she knew Frank meant her to keep inviolate.

But she feared the worst for the man she loved, and woman, actuated by that fear, knows no restraining.

There had been a painful interview between the brother and sister and Zoe on the evening before. Helen had told Frank of Zoe's disclosure to Girard almost before the lawyer was out of sight, and together they had tried to persuade Zoe to tell them more of the circumstances. Their attempts were entirely futile. In spite of all they could say to influence her, they learned nothing from the girl except the bare facts that she had given Girard and the assurance that Mr. Treadwell knew the rest.

This interview had precipitated the one between Frank and the detective, in which Mr. Treadwell told the story of his investigations.

Not satisfied with writing a note to Girard at his boarding place, and telephoning to his stenographer to have him call her up as soon as he should come to the office, Helen telephoned every place in the city where she thought him likely to be found—but all to no purpose.

Where Zoe was, through all those weary hours, and how Frank spent the time after their interview, Helen neither knew nor cared. She only realized that they did not seem to be in hearing distance at the times of her repeated efforts to get Girard over the telephone, and she was thankful that they left her uninterrupted. Her aunt, too, was kept out of her way, in consequence of an attack of neuralgia that confined her to her room.

The seemingly interminable day came to an end, at last, and still she had not succeeded in communicating with Girard.

Summoned to dinner, she went in and took her place at the head of the table. Zoe and Frank were not there. In answer to a question, Tom explained that Miss Zoe had ordered her dinner sent to her room, and that Mr. Frank had said he didn't want anything to eat and would not be down. Demanding the same ceremonious service as usual, Helen sat through the courses, taking care to disclose to the curious eyes of her servants no suggestion of perturbation. That trial finished, she rose quietly and took her way to the sitting-room, utterly at her wits' end. For a long time she sat there, locking and unlocking her nervous fingers, and trying to think out some plan of action. Should she send Tom to look for him? Should she go herself, out into the night, to find him?

Suddenly the sound of the telephone bell near her elbow made her start to her feet with every nerve quivering. She was at the instrument before the ringing ceased.

It was Girard's voice that answered her. He told her that he had just received her note and was anxious to talk with her. He suggested that she meet him the next morning at Mrs. Fitzpatrick's, and Helen understood at once that he was unwilling to come to her home, under the circumstances. She was too impatient, however, to brook any further delay, and

anxiety and distress were evident in every tone of her voice when she answered:

"Well, I'll get one of the neighborhood boys to come with me to you," she called, "meet me at the St. Charles in about three-quarters of an hour."

"No, no!" he exclaimed quickly. "The idea! I'll come up, of course, I will be there in twenty minutes."

They were scarcely in the drawing-room and seated, before Girard asked, with knitted brows:

"Have you read the *Evening Times*?"

"No. Why?" she answered, wonderingly.

"Can't you run and find it for me?"

"We don't take it. What is it, Herbert?"

"This afternoon's issue contains a column article with a half-dozen scare headlines to the effect that the mystery about your father has at last been cleared up. It was written in a suggestive, covert style, for, of course, they didn't dare to mention names yet; but by means of circumlocutions and insinuations they have made public Treadwell's charge against me. If they had given my name and address, they could not have pointed me out with more precision. The fact about the warrant was stated with assurance. Now don't be distressed, sweetheart, the climax is obliged to come, sooner or later, and this will only hurry it up a little. Besides that, it gives me something to boil over about, and so, is a positive relief to me. I dropped around at the *Times* office as soon as I read the article, but the place was closed up. Then I went out to call on

the editor at his boarding-house. He wasn't there, of course. I am going to look him up at his club to-night. My appearance on the street this evening created a sensation," he continued, "'The Lawrence Mystery Cleared Up!' had been cried by the news-boys from one end of the city to the other, and, of course, everybody had bought and read."

"I wish I were a man!" was Helen's choking comment.

"What for, my precious? You want to say bad words?"

"No! I want to fight."

When she was allowed to speak again, Helen told him everything Frank had learned from the detective, Frank's attitude in the matter, and the unsatisfactory outcome of their interview with Zoe on the evening before.

Girard was very much inclined to be impatient with her when she confessed to having told Frank what he had asked her so urgently to keep, but her overwhelming fear for him, stopped the reproach on his lips. Instead of scolding her, he put his arms about her, and, raising her face to look into her eyes, asked:

"And now that you know their charges against me, are you still ready to go with me to wherever my path leads?"

For answer, her arms encircled his neck.

"No, Helen, *no*," he protested. "I am going to be able to offer you my name untarnished, before I take you from your father's house. Little girl—my com-

rade—my life—I am going to tell you something that I have tried to leave untold. I thought to save you from a knowledge that would hurt you more than all else. Now I see that you must hear the truth, sooner or later, and I believe it would best come from me.” He suddenly realized that the suspense of his labored beginning was torturing her, and came to the point at once.

“Helen, I believe that the final outcome of this trouble will incriminate—in some degree—Zoe.”

“Have we all gone mad?” she demanded, but she was quiet, and apparently calm, as he related to her, at length, all the puzzling circumstances in which Zoe was involved. He left nothing untold except that one most distressing suspicion of all.

When he came to the part about his having met Zoe, disguised, in St. Philip street, and about the way in which she had tricked him with the words of the Italian song, Helen’s wide-open eyes expressed nothing short of consternation. He paused a moment, and in that pause she asked, pointedly:

“But how could any of this ‘incriminate’ Zoe? Granting that she tricked you, and Mr. Treadwell, and all of us, might it not have been for the purpose you first thought?”

Girard had taken out his pocket-book and was opening it as she spoke; when she had finished, he handed her the little emerald ring that had been stolen from her. Helen caught her breath as her glance fell on it, but he did not wait for her to question him.

"Zoe sold this to a curio-collector on Chartres street four days after she took it out of your trunk," he said.

"How—how—oh, Herbert!"

"I found it there, myself, accidentally. It was this morning early. I didn't get very much sleep last night, and got up long before time, determined to go back to the spot on St. Philip street where I had seen her, and review the lay of the land. In coming back from there, I wandered aimlessly into one Jean Duchêne's shop and found this displayed in his show case. Of course, when I began to question the old fossil as to how he got the ring, he took panic at once, and gave me a description of the seller that I could plainly see was being spun out of his own brain. I knew I could not wait to set the police after the rascal and make him give up your property, so I offered to buy it on the spot. For all my lack of French, I made him understand it would be much healthier for him to sell it to me without parley; so I brought it away with me. I took the ring at once to Tom Ballard—I employed Ballard & Ballard to work up the defense for me, you know—and gave him the facts. Well, only four hours afterwards, Tom came round to the café where I usually get dinner, and, finding me there, told me that he had put a detective after Duchêne, and had got a true description of the person who sold him the ring. The seller that Duchêne described to Ballard's detective was Zoe to a 'T.'"

“Well?”

“Well, Duchêne further stated that the one who brought him the ring, also offered to sell him a watch—a man’s watch, Helen, with an owl’s head on the case.”

“*Father’s!*”

“Yes, but she broke down and cried when he took it to examine, and finally refused to part with it.”

“Did Mr. Ballard tell you *this?*”

“Yes, and he gave it as his opinion that that girl is the one to lay hands on—that—that—Zoe is, in some way, inextricably wound up in this—tangle.”

“Now just what *do* you believe?” she demanded.

Girard looked at her searchingly. She did not drop her eyes. Her steady gaze made it plain to him that she was not censuring him, but that she was not to be temporized with. Suddenly she put both her hands on his shoulders firmly.

“Tell me all,” she insisted. “You are keeping something from me, and you have no right.”

“All? Why, my dear, have I not told you?”

“It is so unlike you,” she exclaimed, ignoring his question. “You have always been so fearlessly truthful. When before did you ever voluntarily look away from my eyes?”

He brought his glance back to her face again, instantly; but he could not look a lie, and in the attempt a slight color spread over his bronzed face.

“Helen, I have told you all you could bear to hear,” he answered, simply.

She kept her hands on his shoulders, and said, emphatically:

"Look at me, Herbert, I can bear anything, anything, but deception from you. Now what is it that you are keeping from me? I must know—I will!"

Girard had dreaded more than anything else the coming of the time when Helen would have to know the family scandal,—for know it she would have to, in the final clearing up of the mystery that should be his vindication; yet he had never dreamed that he might have to make the disclosure himself.

But Helen had her hands on his shoulders, her eyes on his, and the stubborn determination of the sex which is called weak, pitted against his own. Even then, if he could have hoped to save her from the ordeal for a while longer, he would have refused her the truth; but he knew that she must know, and know quickly, for the climax of the investigation was imminent.

He took her hands from his shoulders, and laid them in her lap with the reverence of touch with which one folds the hands of the dead. Then he moved a little away from her, and told her the story. He stumbled once only—when he attempted to excuse to her her father's sin. Helen was gazing fixedly into space, cold, white, unmoving. It suddenly came to Girard that she did not, and never would, understand, and he hesitated in his excuses, and took up the thread of the story again.

When he had quite finished, there was silence be-

tween them for a space that lengthened interminably. He, too, was looking away, but he saw nothing of the objects on which his gaze rested. After a little, he changed his position, quietly, and looked at Helen. Her hands were folded as he had laid them; her deep eyes were looking beyond—out into limitless pain.

He was watching her so intently that when she moved, at last, he was almost startled. The white hands sought the white face which dropped suddenly into them. The spell of silence was broken by spasmodic, heaving sobs.

The man leaned over her and buried his face in her arms.

“Tell me that you do not hate me for making you suffer this way, Helen—tell me, for God’s sake!”

Whatever answer she gave was enough, and for a long time he sat with his arms about her, and his cheek against the hands that covered her face.

The quiet that mercifully succeeds every storm, came at last, and Girard led her to an open window, and began to fan the cool night-air against her feverish face. When her quick catching sighs had abated enough for her to speak, she said:

“Now you see, what a good thing it is I did tell Frank. I did it all for you, of course, but—but—oh, I am so thankful Frank has promised not to prosecute—oh, my dear father!”

“Helen!”

She looked up, wonderingly, in answer to his emphatic exclamation.

"But my part in all this, my darling—you forget." His voice had quickly softened again to tenderness.

"Why, why, he will hush it all up, of course, and the world will never hear anything but rumors that it cannot verify. Herbert! Don't look at me in that way—oh, you surely could not be so cruel as to—to——"

"Helen, have you known me all these years, and yet do not know me? Would I have been so cruel as to tell you the truth here to-night, if it had been possible for me to allow it to be 'hushed up'?"

"But my father? Zoe? Oh, have mercy on me."

"Helen, Helen, don't! Mercy from me to you—my life, my soul! Hear me—don't turn away like that! It is my honor that is to be the forfeit. My *honor*, do you hear? Oh, even a woman must understand that that is the one thing a man may not yield—not even to her!"



"OH, EVEN A WOMAN MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THAT IS THE ONE THING
A MAN MAY NOT YIELD!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A CONFESSION

“**I** HAVE just written to Mr. Dawson——” It was Frank’s voice speaking.

Helen and Girard both started to their feet as young Lawrence and the detective entered the room, in close conversation. The four confronted each other.

Who shall say that man has not builded to immortality, when the instincts of gentlemanliness—man-made—can hold in leash the fiercest impulses of the natural creature? Frank Lawrence had been a gentleman for some hundreds of years. His father’s house, his sister’s presence were, now, perforce, guaranties of a certain courtesy to his enemy. When he stood before Girard in that moment of supreme test, he bowed coldly in bitter tribute to his own training. Immediately afterward, however, he straightened himself to his full height, and gave the other man a look in the eyes that challenged to mortal struggle.

Mr. Treadwell looked quickly at Helen. She, too, had seen; she was alert and watching; she seemed to be mistress of her every faculty. The detective moved near enough to say to her under his breath:

“Don’t go, ma’am, please.”

“Sister, may I speak to these gentlemen privately?”

asked Frank, at once; and he held the door open for her in an attitude that had in it the force of a command.

"I know the whole story now, Frank, and I told him what you said," she answered. "I—why I—Frank, I *cannot*."

He urged her again, but to no purpose. Helen remained.

"Mr. Lawrence," said Girard, advancing, "we all know Mr. Treadwell's version of the story in full, now; but none but myself and your sister here knows any other." His voice was quiet, almost kindly. "Since I have been apprised of your course, I think it nothing but fair that you should know mine."

"I have not asked your confidence," replied the man addressed.

"Very true, but I have made charges against one under your protection, to your sister—I prefer to repeat them to the *man* most nearly concerned. No," he continued, interpreting Frank's glance at the detective, "Mr. Treadwell need not retire. What I have to say to you is what I shall state in open court." Without further pause he related what he had just told to Helen about his find in Duchêne's shop with the startling addition, "Mr. Lawrence had that watch on in my office half an hour before he started on his last trip to the plantation." Then he handed the ring to Mr. Treadwell for inspection.

"Zoe is evidently the victim of a deep-laid, malevolent scheme, and has been intimidated into silence,"

answered Frank, with a steadiness of voice that surprised his listeners.

"Then I suppose, it's 'lay on MacDuff!'" said the lawyer—this time to the detective. Girard was quick enough to catch the man's expression off guard for once. He noted, to his satisfaction, that a sickly change had come over the human mask that Treadwell presented to the world.

The detective handed back the ring that he had been examining with absorbed attention, and replied in a business-like tone:

"I have rather insisted on a prosecution, sir, against Mr. Lawrence's protests; but I have lately decided to put aside my professional rights and ambitions, as he has so much at stake. Mr. Lawrence," turning to the other with a benign air of concession, "I leave you to say what shall be done with the warrant I hold against Mr. Girard."

"Tear it up," answered the young man, promptly.

"And by so doing," put in the lawyer to Treadwell, "cover up a blunder that may damage your professional reputation, seriously. You are very shrewd, Mr. Treadwell." The detective darted a quick look at him from under his fat eyelids, but the lawyer dismissed him from his further notice and turned to Frank Lawrence.

"I hardly hope that you will understand or believe me," he said to the young man, "but I tell you, sincerely, I would give all that is mine to give, to be able to withhold my hand. But let that pass. It is

beyond your power to stop this investigation now. In the eyes of the people of New Orleans, I stand accused to-night. Cost what it may, I shall be vindicated before them. I shall be vindicated before you and before your sister."

"I believe in you," Helen interrupted him in a steady voice.

"You believe, Helen. You shall *know*," he answered, with the quiet solemnity of an oath. "You do not seem to realize," he continued to Frank, "that I have more at stake than anyone concerned. If it were yours to choose between the preservation of another man's reputation for chastity, and the maintenance of your own honor, would you hesitate? Would any man hesitate? I know what this involves for Zoe, but I cannot consider even that. It seems to me that there is nothing else to be said between us, except to determine how the investigation shall proceed—for proceed it shall. You have directed your detective to destroy the warrant for my arrest. I appeal to your sense of justice, and ask that you have the warrant served and the case prosecuted."

Frank's nervous hands were grasping the back of a chair with a tension that turned them white, as he answered:

"That is a very plausible defense, and I might be touched by it, if I did not know you for what you are. If the evidence against you were anything short of damning, if you even knew the things that men

call 'honor' and 'justice,' you might plead them here with some effect!"

There was a sudden change in the expression of Girard's eyes which impelled Helen to give him a pleading, piteous look that went to his heart and restrained him. His tone was still steady when he spoke again, but there was the ring of steel in his voice as he answered:

"Then by the aid of other detectives, and with the assistance of all the facts in my possession, *I* shall continue the investigation of your father's murder, until the real criminal is tracked to earth and I stand acquitted in the judgment of every living man and woman."

Young Lawrence's eyes grew black, and the veins stood out on his forehead as he exclaimed in a passion of bitterness:

"And *this* is your love for my sister. When it comes to a choice between yourself and her, you do not hesitate to sacrifice her, even to the dragging of her family name in the dust!"

Helen had drifted near Mr. Treadwell, but she now crossed the group quickly and took her place at Girard's side.

"This then is her answer—Thank God!" he thought, and he looked into her eyes for one instant only before he turned again to Frank.

"What I choose for myself, I choose for Helen. I shall clear my name for my own sake—I must,—

and for her sake, that she may bear it unashamed. I do not deny that in the last analysis I hold my reputation dearer than her happiness. You, Frank Lawrence, are of the mold to understand this, and you will, when you are yourself again." He was making, for Helen's sake, an almost superhuman effort to be calm.

"Liar and murderer!" cried the younger man, now at last in the abandon of rage. "You shall answer to me this night! You shall not live to hold up my father to shame, and the defenseless child of his blood to dishonor! You shall not pollute my sister with your touch!"

The portieres over the folding doors parted, and Zoe flung herself in front of him.

"Frank, Frank! He will kill you!"

The young man made a fierce effort to shake off the grasp that she laid on his arm, and the girl cried out in desperation:

"Don't, don't! *He* didn't do it! It is *I* who am to blame! *I* only!"

With one fierce impulse Frank tore off her grasp and held her at arm's length. He did not open his lips, but his eyes put a question and the girl answered:

"I betrayed your father to the Mafia."

His restraining hand dropped from her wrist. Zoe staggered where she stood, and covered her eyes with her arm. The group about her stood transfixed. So intent were all their faculties on the girl before them,

that they seemed to lose cognizance of each other and to behold and hear—only her.

“To his *death?*” It was Frank’s voice that asked the question. One long moment of crucial suspense passed, and the girl raised her head slowly and dropped her arms at her sides. The drooping lashes were well raised at last, and the eyes that they disclosed were like the eyes of a lost soul. The tortured spirit, becalmed in despair, struggled no further.

“If he is dead, I do not know,” she said simply, “if he lives I do not know. They tell me he is living, but they have lied to me before—I did it because father told you that I was not truthful, not honorable, not fit to be your wife—I caught only that much, for I had hardly got to the door, when I heard someone coming, and had to go away. I did not know how you had taken it, till I gave you a chance that night to prove your faith to me. You let me break with you, you left me. Then I turned into—what I am. I——” she stopped without ending her sentence, and looked from one to another with a dazed expression in her eyes. She seemed to be groping for help.

“How did you come to get in with the Mafia?” It was the detective’s voice that broke the awed silence, and he spoke very low.

“Didn’t I tell you?—I told—you—didn’t I?” she asked, looking wonderingly into the eyes of each. “Help me—somebody help—me—I want to tell.”

Frank and Helen did not speak or move at the appeal, but Girard’s deep voice said, reassuringly:

"The Italians, Zoe, think and tell us when you first got to know anything about them."

"To know the Italians——" she echoed, gropingly, "I am one of them—I—oh, yes," her face cleared slightly. "Frank, I am not what *he* said I was"—she motioned at the detective without taking her eyes from Frank—"I am not your father's child. I am an Italian—my people belong to the Mafia." She paused again; Frank dropped into a seat with his face in his hands; his shoulders were heaving. There were several minutes of awed silence. Girard remembered the decanters of wine that always stood on the sideboard, and crossed the hall quickly, and returned with a glass of sherry in his hand.

"Sit down, child, and drink this," he said kindly. "Don't try to talk now." He guided Zoe to a chair, and stood by her as she drained the glass. He raised his eyes from her once, and they fell on Helen. She was standing quite still, her eyes fixed on the alien girl as if all else in her presence were invisible. Girard's gaze compelled hers for a moment—she looked up at him, but only fleetingly, then dropped her glance again to Zoe.

"If you will raise the window, Mr. Treadwell, she will feel better," said Girard, in a quiet voice. "This room is too close."

The detective complied, and a rush of cool air filled the room. Zoe turned her face toward it, and Girard had the relief of seeing her rally sensibly under the combined influence of the fresh air and the stimulant

he had given her. He felt instinctively how awful was the suspense of this intermission to Frank and Helen, for he knew that their anxiety must far outweigh his own, but he did not dare to press the desperate girl before him. He looked at Mr. Treadwell, grimly. There was suspense in his face too, for all his iron determination not to show it.

Girard took a seat in front of the reviving girl, and said, persuasively:

"You are better now, Zoe. Can't you tell us all about it?"

"Ask her about father, again." It was Helen's voice this time, but it was strained and unnatural. Zoe turned her face wearily toward the speaker, then back again to Girard.

"Tell us about him, Zoe," he said gently. "You stopped where Frank let you break with him, and you got so angry." Her voice was lifeless and monotonous, but unwavering now, as she answered without pausing:

"I went that very night to Diego's house. I told him a story. I told him that father had read those papers and was going to tell the police; that if they would kill him, I would steal the papers for them, and the police would never know." The three men exchanged startled glances. Frank was dry-eyed and intent again. "I told Diego," continued the girl, "that father was going to the plantation the next day. Then I went home. I was sorry—so sorry—and I wanted to tell father what I had done, but I couldn't.

Then I thought I would go with him, and keep Diego from getting him; but he told me he was not going to the plantation that day, and that when he went he would be sure to take me with him. He—he—changed his mind, you know, and went that day; and Diego and the others caught him on the bridge. They struck him to stun him, and then waded down the bayou with him a long way till they got to the bateau they had left there—and—and——”

“And what, Zoe?” Girard’s voice grated on the stillness.

“They rowed him down to a house-boat, and brought him back in that, up the river to the city. Diego says he didn’t kill him, because he could make him swear not to tell on them, and could get a big ransom for him.”

Again the men exchanged glances. This time there was something final in the look that passed between them. Frank started to speak, but stopped suddenly at a warning from Girard’s uplifted hand. The lawyer was anxious that the girl be kept in her present quiet state, and feared that Frank would excite her and perhaps defeat his efforts to get the whole truth from her.

“What else did they tell you about Mr. Lawrence, Zoe? What do they promise you?” he asked with studied quiet.

“They say hē is here,” she answered, in a tone akin to his own. “Sometimes they say they are good to him, and sometimes—but that is when I don’t

have any money for them. I took all I could get to give them. Then I took the other things to sell and get more money. They are devils—*devils!* They keep promising I can have him back for money, and when I take it to them, they always want more. They let me see his watch”—she put her hand to her bosom—“it is here. I slipped it away from them. They wanted to prove to me that they had him; and they showed me his knife, and some of his hair, and one time—Great God!” Her arms went up to her eyes again, and she dropped back against the cushions. Girard snatched up a piece of music from the stand near, and began to fan her vigorously.

“Don’t think about that, now, Zoe,” he urged. “It was a hideous lie, whatever it was. Try your best to go on, little girl. It is all you can do for him now. The papers you mentioned—what were they, Zoe? Were they the ones that were left on the steps with you when you were a baby? The package that was stolen from your father’s desk?”

She lowered her arms listlessly, again, but her face was ghastly, as she looked at him.

“Yes,” she said, laboredly. “I took them out of the desk. I saw you when you showed Frank where they were hidden.”

“What was in those papers, Zoe?”

“The secrets of the Mafia.”

Frank and Treadwell gave vent to excited exclamations, but Girard signaled to them again to be quiet, and the girl stumbled on:

"Don't you know? The signs and oaths, and all about their order here; and it had the names of all the members."

It cost Girard an almost superhuman effort to be calm when he asked:

"And where are those papers now, child? Did you give *them* to the Italians?"

"No."

"*God!*" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Frank! Treadwell! We'll swing every cut-throat among them!" He felt a pair of cold little hands close about one of his own, and he checked himself and looked down into Zoe's eyes.

"Hang me, too," she said to him. "I am one of them—one of the worst. I want to die as soon as I find father—he gave me a fair chance in life—he said he did—and I have failed. Nobody will ever forgive me, nobody will ever love me any more—I am lost—lost!"

"Hush, child, hush!" he exclaimed, putting his hand on her temples, kindly. "Who would harm you, Zoe? You have had your punishment," he said slowly, bending her head back to look into the ghastly face, "and Fate has not bated one jot or tittle of the expiation. Child, where did you come from? How did you come?" he asked suddenly.

"My mother brought me here," she answered with the same directness, "when she found out that my father was in the Mafia. She was good—my mother was; and she wanted to save me—save *me!*" said the

girl, with a wild little emphasis on the last word. Girard hastened to put in another question to keep her thoughts from wandering.

"Did she bring those papers, too, Zoe?"

"Yes," answered the girl, "she stole them from Diego—she tore them out of his book, because she wanted the Mafia broken up. She hated Diego, but she didn't want him killed. She left a letter telling him what she had done so he could escape with his life."

"Was there anything in that package about you, Zoe?" Girard asked.

"Yes, my mother had put a note in it, telling all about me."

"What became of your mother?" he asked.

"Diego says she drowned herself."

"Who is 'Diego,' Zoe?"

"The Mafia chief, and—my father."

"How did those demons get a hold on you?"

"I met Diego's mother in Carrollton Gardens one day. Do you remember?" She asked the question of Helen, but the latter did not speak, and the mournful eyes turned to Girard again. "She told me then, but she didn't tell me the evil of it. She had been trying to get a chance to speak to me for years, she said, and at last had disguised herself that way, so she could approach me without exciting suspicion. She asked me to come to her at a place she told me about; but she made me swear not to tell—she made me swear on an image of the Saviour she

had on her tray. I was fascinated. I had wanted so long to know about myself, and so I went.

"It was down on St. Philip street. I met Diego there. I think he must have cast some evil spell over me, for I did whatever he told me. I went, and went; and gradually he told me all the truth. He scared me, and threatened me, and made me swear such cruel oaths, I couldn't resist him. Then he told me about the papers, and said he would kill me if I didn't get them. I had searched already, for I had always wanted to see what was in them, but I hunted and hunted again. When I saw how crazy Diego was to get them, and to keep father from reading them, I realized that I had a hold on him; and I determined to use it to get rid of him. Well—then—then this other came. I was mad with father and Frank—and I was Diego's child and a demon like him. I went to Diego and told him that father had found and read the papers—and—and—I have told you the rest."

As by one trembling, momentary flash of lightning we view the plane of our vision to its utmost bounds, so in the light of that confession, Girard beheld the extent of his blundering and misconception.

Not an hour before, that illusive, mysterious creature had been to him the impersonation of subtle scheming—the conceiver of a long and complicated system of treachery. In that moment he beheld her as she was—the incarnation of passionate sinning and passionate repentance—a creature in the death-grip of a wild fear, now driven into folly, now into sin—the tortured plaything of the Mafia.

Girard brought his mind back with an effort to a question that had suggested itself to him a few moments before.

"Zoe, did the Mafia plan that scheme to charge me with the crime?"

"Yes. They had sworn to get even with you about that lynching, but they were afraid to murder you after you posted that threat against them; so when father disappeared, and Mr. Treadwell got so hot on the right trail, they plotted to throw the suspicion on you. They have spent thousands of dollars in bribing false witnesses against you. And they got hold of a note you wrote to a negro workman in Vicksburg, telling him to come to the city to see you on business. It was written in June of the year before. They changed only the last figure of the date, and made it seem that you had sent for him to do the murder. They promised Mr. Dawson five thousand dollars to say what they told him to say about you. They also threatened to kill him if he didn't."

"And that man, Freeman, is the Mafia's agent, isn't he?"

"Yes, he was in disguise, you know. He is the one they employed to bribe the jury that tried those Italians last March, but he pretended to be a stranger from the West. He hated you because you helped to find out on him, and made him leave town. He has run away again, and Mr. Dawson has gone. They got scared."

"How did you find out all this, Zoe?"

"Diego's mother told me the Mafia's plan against

you. She knew I didn't like you, and she thought I hated you as she did. It was her son that you hanged in the prison that day."

"And did you run the risk of telling me the accusation against me, to save me from them, child?"

"No. To save myself. You were close on my track, and I thought I could scare you away till I had bribed them to give me father back again."

"Then why is it you tell me everything now?"

"Because I was watching, and I saw your eyes when Frank called you a murderer. I was afraid you would kill him."

He leaned forward and said in a low tone:

"Poor little girl!—Zoe," he said aloud, rising to his feet in a business-like way, "go right now and get us those papers."

"Yes," put in the detective, quickly. "We can't lose another moment. They will take panic at the flight of Dawson and his accomplice, and we'll never lay hands on them."

"Quick, child," urged the lawyer. "Why on earth are you hesitating?"

"You—you—can't have them!" she cried, springing to her feet, "they are all I have to make them give me back my father. They'd kill him if you went—they'd *kill* him, I tell you. I am the only one that can treat with them!"

The girl was wildly excited now. Frank and Treadwell were quick to second Girard's demand for the papers. There was to be no compromise. They must

come, they assured her, and she must surrender them and stand out of the way. At bay at last, the girl stood with her back to the center-table and panted like a wild thing at the end of the chase.

"I'll—I'll—get them," she almost gasped. "They are not here, now, not anywhere near here. I have hidden them. I'll have to go for them—go a long way."

Girard and Treadwell looked at each other in impatience, and Frank said, in a tone of finality:

"You will not go one step of the way to them without me; but get those papers you must and shall. This I mean, Zoe. Do you understand me?"

The ringing harshness of his voice caused the group to quiet suddenly and fall a little apart, leaving him and the Italian girl confronting each other. Zoe slowly raised her lashes till her eyes met his in one long, unwavering look.

Girard turned from the unrelenting countenance of the young man to the despairing appeal in the face of the girl, and the thought flashed across him that if there be souls that fail of immortality, and meet their judgment at the hands of man, here stood one such, incarnate. In the voice of one who had come all unshriven to a solemn, last accounting, she answered:

"Yes, Frank. I understand." Then her despairing gaze sought Helen where she stood on the hearth-rug, unspeaking, unmoving.

"*Helen!*" she implored. But Helen turned away.

From Helen to Frank, and back, and yet back again, the anguished eyes appealed; then, suddenly seeming to lose sight of the room and its occupants, she almost whispered:

"You promised to be witness for my defense—father!"

Helen would have sunk to the floor had not the detective, who was nearest, caught and supported her. Girard and Frank at once sprang to her, and together they laid her on the sofa. She was unconscious. There were a few minutes of quick excitement in which everybody struggled to help, and nobody seemed to know how; and then Helen opened her eyes to sorrow again.

"*Zoe has gone!*" At the exclamation from Treadwell, Girard rose quickly from his kneeling position beside Helen, and the three men looked at each other in dismay.

"Good God!" cried Frank. "Don't let her go back to them. Zoe, Zoe!"

There was instant panic in the group which quickly spread until it included Miss Susan upstairs and the servants in the kitchen. The house was searched in every nook and corner, but Zoe was not to be found.

"I think I know which way she has gone, Frank," said Girard, as he met the distracted young fellow in the hall after the fruitless search. While he was speaking, the detective joined them, and was instantly included by Girard in what he was saying: "I know a place in the heart of the Italian Quarter where she

used to go. I believe that is where she meets this 'Diego' and where she has gone now; and I'll bet she has those papers with her."

"It strikes me, we need the police in this," interrupted Treadwell, "and it's my advice to telephone for 'em at once."

"You do it, then," instantly assented young Lawrence. "Tell me where that place is, Girard," he was choking with excitement—"I am going without waiting. I—I am afraid——" but he could not word his fear.

"I'll go with you," answered the other, laying his arm across the young fellow's shoulders. The look that Frank gave him in answer said all that was needed to be said between them. Girard then quickly produced a note-book from his pocket and tore out a leaf. "Here is a description of the place," he explained, "I wrote it down when it was fresh in my mind. We'll leave this for Treadwell and the police. The sooner we are off, the better."

He handed the address to the detective, who was already at the telephone, and after a few hurried explanations, snatched his hat from the rack and followed the impatient Frank.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

EXPIATION

IT was nearly midnight, and the raw, penetrating rain came down pitilessly, as the two men turned into St. Philip street and quickened their steps in the direction of the river. They had dismissed their hack several blocks back.

The two or three stragglers that they met only took a curious, sleepy survey of them as they hurried past. Girard recalled with a thrill the pass-word that Francisco had given him, but no one challenged.

The way now lay through almost total darkness. The badly drained street swam with thin, black mud, and the open sewers were glutted with the undisturbed filth of rainless months. The unholy hour and the unholy place seemed in league with the frowning elements. A block further, and no soul was in sight but themselves; still the two men moved as noiselessly as possible in their agitated suspense, and spoke seldom. The one thought, the one purpose of each, now, was to save the desperate Zoe from whatever other frantic act she might attempt in her despair.

The lights became fewer and fewer, then darkness enveloped the scene.

Suddenly the mad folly of the expedition presented itself to Girard. Here they were searching in a locality that they did not know, a locality that was overflowing with thousands of inhabitants whose very tongue was strange to them, for a girl who had disappeared five miles across town—searching in the black dark, and among a treacherous people.

And yet it was absolutely the only thing to be done. Another half-block, and Girard paused.

"It is along here," said he, coming close enough to his companion to touch his shoulder, and speaking in a low tone. "Did you bring a pistol? I didn't."

"No," answered the other, "I didn't have time to think of it."

"Have your knife where you can put your hand on it, then"—and after a pause—"the others ought to get here soon."

"Whether they come or not," answered the other, in a whisper, "I must find Zoe—I promised father——" Even in the intensity of that moment, Girard noted the fact that he did not say, "I must find father." He, too, then, had despaired of that.

"Of course," answered his friend, "we must." A few paces more and Girard paused before a black hole in the wall to the left.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, and don't lose yourself in here," he said, almost inaudibly. The other obeyed and they entered the midnight blackness of the arcade together. A gust of wind in their faces explained to Girard the absence of the light he had

expected to find. He bore to the right till his outstretched hand touched a damp wall. He counted five paces forward, then stopped and began feeling about the wall for the crucifix that he remembered to have seen there. In spite of his calculations, however, his hand encountered only the crumbling bricks, and he began feeling about in uncertainty. Apprehensive of having made a mistake in the place, he reached out the other hand quickly. It came down on a cold something, and his fingers instantly identified the crossed, nail-pinioned feet.

"God! How we grope!" he inadvertently exclaimed, as he drew back his hand quickly. At that moment the sound of a distant bell came distinct and solemn on the night-air. They listened a second in silence, and then the other asked in a whisper:

"Are we in the right place?"

"Yes, come on."

A dozen or more uncertain steps, and Girard put out his hand and touched the grape-vine curtain that he remembered only too well. Another moment and the two men stood in the open beyond it.

The ground under their feet, the sky above them, and the enveloping atmosphere were all one gray-black element of rain and darkness, while around, on four sides, rose great uneven shadows of a yet deeper black. At length their wide, unfocused eyes caught a point of light high up in one of the deepest shadows.

Girard paused to get his bearings and to recall the

details of the picture. They were facing the east, he told himself; a few paces straight ahead and a few more to the left would bring them to the foot of that well-remembered, boxed-up stair. That would lead to somewhere near that point of light, he calculated.

He touched his companion in further signal for silence, and advanced slowly and cautiously. Again the conviction came over him of the folly of their quest, but he took a grim satisfaction in feeling that fate, and not themselves, had made fools of them.

The stillness was broken again—this time by a light, irregular step like that of a person who was lame. It was coming toward them. It stopped as they moved forward.

“Chi arrive?” It was a woman’s voice that challenged.

“Un amico,” answered Girard with Francisco’s pass-word; and taking Frank by the arm, he walked on with feigned deliberation. There was the sound of the light, irregular step again, but this time it was receding.

Thirteen paces straight ahead, and ten to the left, and the guide put his hand on the box-side of the remembered stair. Then he turned instinctively and looked back. A faint, flickering light as of a wind-blown candle shone out of the arcade through which they had entered the court. At sight of it, Girard

felt a very human impulse to hurry on his way, but he thrust his head forward into the close dampness of the boxed-up stairway and stopped still and listened. There were no dim echoes haunting it to-night.

"Take off your shoes," he whispered, and he was soon, himself, in his stocking feet. The stair was long and steep, but they lost no time in reaching the top.

Here they felt the fresh air against their faces again; and they realized that the black darkness of the enclosed stairway had been exchanged for the gray darkness of the inclement night. They were evidently on a balcony of some kind. The point of light toward which they had tried to direct their course had gone out. More helpless than a blind man, Girard advanced. His untrained touch encountered first a stretch of wall, then the woodwork of a closed door that offered no ray of light, then the cold brick masonry again. A little more groping, and he put his hand on the corner of the wall he was feeling, and turned abruptly to the left.

They had scarcely taken a half-dozen steps more, when a ray of light pierced Girard's unprepared eye like a knife. He stepped back quickly. He and his companion grasped each other in silence. Someone had touched a window-blind from the inside and caused a loose slat to fall in a horizontal position.

Young Lawrence sprang past his companion and put his eye to the aperture. He had no sooner done so, however, than he grasped the lawyer's arm with

the grip of a vise. Girard's face was beside his in an instant. Their eyes rested on Zoe.

Across the room from where they watched, the girl stood, disheveled, bareheaded, and dripping wet. Her face was toward them, but the perfect features were so distorted, the olive beauty of the skin so blanched out of all semblance to itself, that Girard, for an instant, doubted his very eyes.

There was a smothered groan from the man beside him.

"Keep your nerve, for God's sake!" whispered Girard to him. "She's safe. We must find out all we can."

A slight movement near them brought into the range of their vision another person—a person toward whom the girl's gaze seemed directed. In front of her, and near the window at which Girard and young Lawrence watched, stood a man. His back was nearly directly toward them. He was small, with coal-black hair, and his cheek was swarthy. As far as could be seen, he was well-dressed. The room in which the two stood was furnished with a barbaric richness that ill-accorded with the squalor of the Italian Quarter.

Girard looked from the girl to the man and his surroundings, then back at the girl again, and he felt that here, at last, this creature who had been so strangely out of harmony with that other life had found her fitting element.

Then his quick eye lighted on a door on the left-

hand side of the room. He remembered to have touched this shortly before they turned the corner on their way around the balcony. The door had a strong wooden bar across it. Girard quietly fingered the window at which they stood, and decided that it would be easier and quicker work to burst in the door than to tear open that strong blind. He put his lips to his companion's ear, and whispered:

"When I say 'come,' follow me around the corner to the outside of that door and help me burst it open. Have your knife out, and don't hesitate to use it."

A quick deep breath from the man beside him directed his glance again to the girl. She had taken a step forward and was speaking:

"I have told you the truth, Diego." The vibrating appeal of the low voice cut to the hearts of the hidden listeners. The two scarcely breathed, so intent were they to hear.

"*You?*" It was the man's voice that replied, but the musical timbre of it only pointed its cruelty.

The watchers saw the girl raise her head quickly—then drop it again with all the fire of the first movement suddenly spent.—

"Yes, *I*."

"Ah—you—you-u-u—so full of truth—so full of truth! You have never lie to me—ha? You have never lie to *him*—the old man with the white hair—ha? *ha?*"

Girard fastened an iron grip on young Lawrence's arm, for the other had made a quick movement.

"Wait!" he commanded.

Neither of them would have recognized the voice that answered, if they had not been looking straight into the white face of the speaker:—

"Oh, by the torture I have suffered for the lies I told him, I swear to you now, Diego, that I did *not* tell them where or how to find you. I did not betray you——" The low voice of the Italian broke in:

"You did not betray *me*—ha?—But the old man with the white hair—ha?—ha?"

A low quivering cry fixed every muscle of the two listeners. The girl sank on her knees and dropped her head on her arms.

Someone *laughed*. A dagger thrust would have been less startling. To the strained eyes of the watchers, the scene took on a dimness, an unreality, so against all nature was its supreme cruelty. Time ceased to be for them. It may have been in the next moment—it may have been after many moments—that the girl's arms dropped away from her face, leaving them to read there what her dry lips now echoed:—

"I have suffered all that there is to suffer, Diego. I do not need your taunting."

"All that there is to suffer? Pazienza, my little one, there is something still in store for you." And his demoniacal laughter gurgled up again.

The girl sprang to her feet and retreated a step or two before him, but there was nothing of *fear* in the terrible look that she flashed at him.

"*You are a demon!*" she choked.

"And you, my pretty Carlandrina—my demon child——" the man took a seat on a near-by table and laughed, and swung his foot in devilish enjoyment as he added— "the cherished darling of the old man with the white——"

"*Spare me!*" the sharp scream of anguish rang out startlingly.

Frank Lawrence made a violent movement, but Girard restrained him quickly.

"Frank! Your *father!* *He may be living.* For God's sake keep quiet till we hear something certain about him."

Their eyes were on the girl. She had staggered as from a blow, and every spark of the sudden fire that had flashed through her had gone out, leaving her white and quivering.

"Diego," she pleaded, "by—by—by *this——*" her dark hands grasped the base of a statue of the Blessed Mother— "by *her*, I swear to you that I stole and kept the papers, and not one of them has seen them. I broke the seal myself, and no one else has touched them since. He *did not* read them. He never looked at a single word in them. Give him back to me—oh, *give him back to me!*"

Her appeal was interrupted by a ripple of laughter from her companion. He bent over in his mirthful

enjoyment. He sat up again and rubbed his hands together in glee.

The watchers saw the girl turn whiter under his derision. Girard expected to hear her flame out at the Italian again, but she did not. She only waited in dead silence. When she spoke again, the agonized entreaty still quivered in her voice:

"You—keep faith with each other. You will not break with me," she urged, "and you promised, you know you did, when you made a thief of me."

"‘Promise’! ah so I did, little damosel, but think and tell me—did I swear?" and his laughter gurgled up again.

"You—you *promised*," she pleaded, almost inaudibly.

"Ah, my pretty one, then tell me, why should I keep a promise to *you*?"

"Because," she exclaimed, rallying for an instant, "because you'd give your soul for the papers that I have here in my bosom."

Girard's quick eye caught a momentary gleam of surprise and triumph as it flashed across the dark face of the man.

"Not *my* soul, my love, but *yours*,—and the price, it is already paid."

"I know it," she answered him—and the scene took on a dim remoteness.

Musical as it was, the low voice of the Italian grated on the fateful quiet when he next spoke:

"The old man—the white-haired old man—you

love him—ha?” With that one wrench the torturer crushed the last vestige of spirit in her.

“Yes,” she moaned.

“You love him so much—ha?”

“Yes, yes!”

“You want him—free?”

“My God! Yes!”

“So? So? Then what more can you give for him? A man’s freedom is worth much.”

“My life,” she said simply, “I have nothing else. I, only, know what is in those papers, and I have them for you. You can kill me, and the secrets will be all your own again. Oh, if there is one drop of mercy in you, take my life now in exchange for his!”

No longer was the girl before them in harmony with the evil about her. She had stepped out of it—above it—in that crucial moment.

“So, so, so, so, so!” exclaimed her companion in quick staccato. “Now tell me, tell me true. Why should I kill *you* to keep the secrets inviolate, and let him go who has been among us and who can tell much?”

“I am of you, and may not be trusted,” she answered him, “but you can make him promise. He is different. He will keep faith.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the Italian, now dancing about in his delight, “ha, ha, ha! ‘he will keep faith,’ ha, ha, ha! So will he, my pretty one, dead men *all* ‘keep faith’! Dead? Yes, *dead* I say you! Did I not stab the life out of him with this hand?

Bring him here *alive*? Ah, no, my sweet! Why should we, when the Mississippi is so silent and so deep?"

For one fateful moment the girl looked her tormentor in the eyes, then in a flash she changed into a thing akin to himself. She tore open the bosom of her dress and snatched out a gleaming dagger. She darted like an adder at the fiend before her.

"Come!" shouted Girard, unconsciously at the pitch of his voice, and a moment after he and his companion hurled their combined weight against the door. It shook and cracked, but it did not give way. Again and more furiously they flung themselves against it. This time the lock gave way and the door swung back against the wall with a crash.

The room was black dark, and there was a rush of cold, damp air from the direction of the window. It must have been opened.

Girard started toward it, but his foot struck against something on the floor and he stumbled, nearly losing his balance. Just then a light flickered up from some dying embers on the hearth, and he glanced down to see what had tripped him.

There at his feet lay Diego's demon child with her own dagger turned against her and pressed deep into her breast. The window was wide open. Diego and the secrets of the Mafia had disappeared into the night.

The light flared up again. This time Frank Lawrence was on his knee beside the murdered girl.

Girard watched the eerie scene like a man under a spell. Was the fitful light tricking him, or did the girl's long lashes tremble apart for an instant? Frank was leaning closer now. Suddenly on the stillness his voice broke:

"Zoe, tell him that I *tried*."

THE END



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